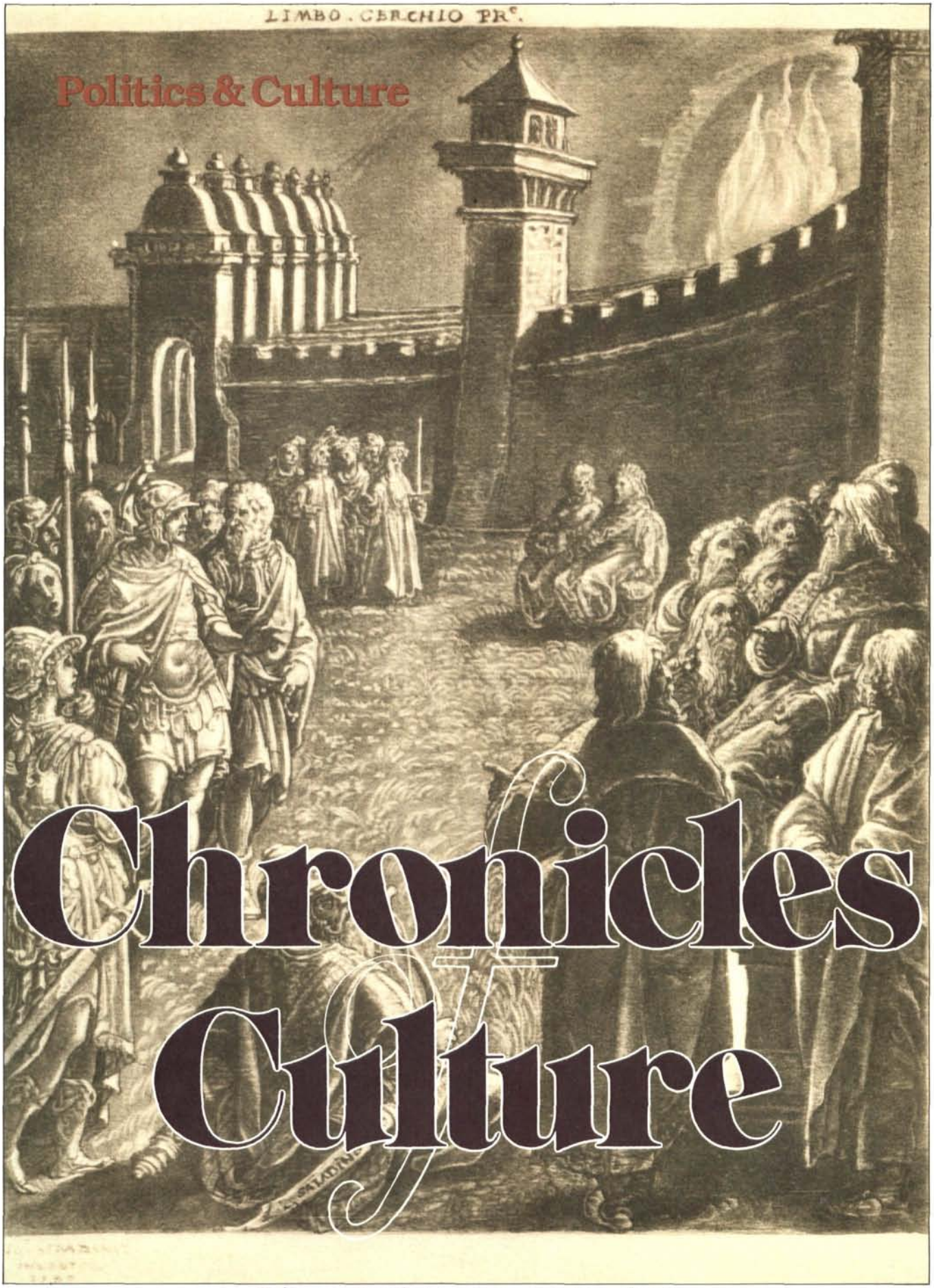


Politics & Culture

Chronicles of Culture

Volume 7, Number 1 January 1983 $1.50

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contents

4 Comment — Charles Moser

Opinions & Views

6 Of Communists and Marxists — Lee Congdon
—Maurice Isserman: *Which Side Were You On?*
—William Barrett: *The Truants*

8 Sighting Sylphs and Stalking Sense — Gary S. Vasilash
—Annie Dillard: *Living by Fiction*
—Leon Edel: *Stuff of Sleep and Dreams*

11 Speculations on a Tendentious Science — John C. Caiazza
—Garry Wills: *The Kennedy Imprisonment*
—James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle: *After the Fact*
—François Kersaudy: *Churchill and de Gaulle*

14 Missives About Man — Carson Daly
—*Selected Letters of James Thurber;* Edited by Helen Thurber and Edward Weeks
—*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien;* Edited by Humphrey Carpenter with Christopher Tolkien

16 Honest & Dishonest Confusion — Samuel T. Francis
—Brian Crozier: *The Minimum State*
—Edward S. Herman: *The Real Terror Network*

19 Systems of Systemlessness & Other Woes — Allan C. Carlson
—Rainer C. Baum: *The Holocaust and the German Elite*

21 Sleaze Experimental and Conventional — Stephen L. Tanner
—John Hawkes: *Virginie: Her Two Lives*
—Alice Adams: *To See You Again*

23 Lessons Unlearned — William R. Hawkins
—Harry G. Summers, Jr.: *On Strategy*

25 Pushcart Perversions & Blasphemy as Toy — Bryce Christensen
—Scott Sommer: *Last Resort*
—Greg Barron: *Groundrush*

27 We the People: Forest, Trees, or Roadside Zoo — Marion Montgomery
—Peter Davis: *Hometown*
—John Shelton Reed: *One South*

29 Penny-Ante Controversies — Edward J. Walsh
—Marge Piercy: *Braided Lives*
—Margaret Atwood: *Bodily Harm*
—George Stade: *Confessions of a Ladykiller*

32 Punks, Potheads, & Phonies — Clay Clemens
—Marshall W. Fishwick: *Common Culture and the Great Tradition*
—Timothy Leary: *Changing My Mind, Among Others*
—Malcolm E. Smith: *The Real Marijuana Danger*

Commendables

35 On Politics and Poetry: *Reclaiming a Patrimony*
High Celebrations: *Atlantic High*

In Focus

35 Circus Wagons of Phosphorescence: *Flanagan's Run*

36 Psychotherapeutic Bactine: *Dr. David Reuben's Mental First-Aid Manual*
Gastronomic Delights and Soggy Leftovers: *Culture and Cuisine, Uncivil Liberties*

37 Perceptibles

Waste of Money

38 Doleful Dirge for an Aging Delinquent — Stephen Macaulay
—Enzo Siciliano: *Pasolini*

Waste of Paper: *Un-American Activities*

39 On the Warpath Against the Right: *Blood of the Land*
Dick Clark Meets Marx: *Sound Effects*

Screen

41 A Lark from the Hollywood Hills: *My Favorite Year*

Art

41 An Incomplete Beauty: *Political Graphics*

Journalism

42 Scurvy Self-Righteousness

The American Proscenium

42 Politics & Culture

43 Self-Assessment—Space-Age Apostolate

Liberal Culture/9, 40

Errata

In the essay "The Capitalism-Democracy-Freedom Debate" (November 1982, pp. 6-8) by Edward J. Lynch, the sentence that read: "Over time, the economic system does not change visibly with only commercial fanfares as old products become obsolete and new products take their place, changing the tastes and the character of people as they change the goods and services they consume" should read: "Over time, the economic system does change visibly . . ."

In the Correspondence section, "Letter from Chicago" (December 1982, pp. 44-46), *American Machinist* magazine is incorrectly identified as *American Machine* magazine.

Vol. 6, No. 8 December 1982

The Open Mind

Caiazza: Comment; Christensen on Conlin and Brinkley *(The Troubles, Voices of Protest);* Vasilash on Kostelanetz *(The Avant-Garde Tradition in Literature);* Levine on Schell *(The Fate of the Earth);* Fleming on Toynbee and Renault *(The Greeks and Their Heritages, Funeral Games);* Morrisey on Appelfeld and Ozick *(The Age of Wonders, Levitation);* Fox on Brooks and McBride *(Lulu in Hollywood, Hawks on Hawks);* C. Wilson on Havard, Reed and Singal *(A Band of Prophets, Regionalism and the South);* Wolfe on Lodge and Williams *(Souls and Bodies, County Woman);* Clarke on Böll and Horgan *(The Safety Net, Mexico Bay);* Havard on Lipset *(Political Man);* Thorne on Cheever and Steiner *(Oh What a Paradise It Seems, The Portage to San Cristóbal of A.H.);* Commendables; In Focus; Waste of Money; Screen; Music; Correspondence; Journalism; The American Proscenium; In My Solitude; Liberal Culture.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chronicles of Culture

Vol. 7, No. 1 January 1983

Politics & Culture

Chronicles of Culture (ISSN 0163-1187) is published monthly by The Rockford Institute, 934 North Main Street, Rockford, Illinois 61103. President: John Howard. Editorial and business offices: (815) 964-5054. Editor: Leopold Tyrmand; Associate Editor: Gary S. Vasilash; Managing Editor: Rebecca Woosley; Editorial Intern: Bryce Christensen; Editorial Secretary: Julie Maloyan; Publisher: Richard A. Vaughan; Production Coordinator: Lindy Ellingwood; Subscription Manager: Anita Fedora. Printed by Wilson-Hall Co. Technical Services: Marge Wollschlager Composition. Subscriptions: $18.00 one year.

Cover: "Il Castello Degli Eroi—Poeti e Filosofi (Inferno, Canto, IV), by Giovanni Stradano (1536-1605) from the MacLeish Collection, The Rare Print Cabinet, Rockford College Library. Original vignette by Warren Chappell.
Copyright © 1983 by The Rockford Institute. All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

COMMENT

History, in the end, remembers a society more by its culture than by its politics. If a modern American knows little about the dramatists and poets and sculptors of ancient Greece or Rome, he knows even less about their political leaders. The point is well put in an anecdote told in the Soviet Union: a century hence a Russian schoolchild asked to identify Leonid Brezhnev recalls him as a politician in the age of Solzhenitsyn.

A society's culture encompasses the entire gamut of its spiritual possibilities, starting with art at the highest level and extending to the front page of a daily newspaper. Furthermore, a culture must deal with the society's established moral and religious values, even when it sets out to challenge them.

Politics has to do with the selection of a society's governmental leaders and with the formulation of its laws and regulations. A society's legislation necessarily reflects its ethical standards: if most members of a society believe it wrong to kill under ordinary circumstances, its laws will include sanctions against murder. Society continually legislates morality; the conflict is always over *which* —not *whether*—moral standards should be incorporated in its rules. In our day American society is plagued by a political and cultural division between those who defend moral standards in our legislation and those who reject them.

In premodern times culture dominated politics, a situation which persisted into recent centuries. Actually, culture and politics generally worked in tandem. In Russia, for example, only in the 19th century did the cultural elite adopt a hostile stance toward the political objectives of the state. Both before and after that time—as in the Soviet Union today—the artist generally supported the interests of the government. Many of the great Russian writers of the 18th century were also government officials, and in the 1780's Catherine the Great even wrote (or at least had published under her name) satirical plays intended to improve the morals of society, as a supplement to the legislation she promulgated for the same purpose.

In the course of time, however, politics spread throughout society, until finally Marxist theory declared that politics should permeate society entirely, and therefore also determine its culture. So culture—even high culture—has become the concern of the totalitarian state, which establishes Ministries of Culture to tend to it. The writer in a totalitarian society knows that he faces political penalties—imprisonment, exile, perhaps even death—if he goes against the official cultural line, precisely because the political authorities consider what he does important. By contrast, the American writer enjoys an enviable artistic freedom, but he knows in his soul that he owes this to the belief among the powerful that his activities are of no political consequence. In the American polity the notion that ideas have no practical impact on society is still powerful and influential.

In analyzing culture and politics we may make another useful division: between what can be called the central culture and the peripheral culture, and between legislative and electoral politics, for there is a special link between the central culture and legislative politics, and between the peripheral cultural and electoral politics.

The central culture based in the great intellectual centers—Boston, New York, Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles—controls the major radio and television networks, newspapers, the book-publishing industry, prominent organs of opinion, the universities, and so forth. Surveys consistently show that a very considerable proportion of those who create our central culture espouse ethical values at variance with the moral traditions of the population at large, and they work vigorously to advance those values in every way possible. The peripheral culture is scattered through the heartland of the country, in the small-town newspapers, local radio and television stations, small newsletters, civic organizations. The values the peripheral

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

culture holds dear are much closer to those held by the people at large than those of the central culture.

Electoral politics is more closely tied to the peripheral culture than to the central one, because electoral campaigns are conducted over the length and breadth of the nation, with substantial direct contact between representative and constituent. The communication channels between representative and constituent (brochures, local radio and television advertising, electoral meetings) are controlled primarily by the organs of the peripheral culture. Consequently, the concerns of the ordinary citizen carry much more weight in the electoral process than in the legislative process. So the electorate mistakenly assumes that the good men it has elected to office will do the right thing in Washington. The frequent complaint that Senator X says one thing at home and does another in Congress reflects a psychological division that is rooted as much in culture as it is in politics—as the central culture defines the overall agenda of legislative politics. It decides which issues are important (nuclear power, racism, feminism, Israeli "imperialism") and which are not (the Soviet threat, genocidal aggression in Afghanistan and Angola, the right to life, school prayer, busing for racial balance). Party leaders in Congress often have safe constituencies, with token opposition or none at all: they are therefore less influenced by the peripheral culture, and so listen primarily to the political demands of the central culture. The staffs of Congressional committees who arrange legislative hearings form a part of that central culture, and the permanent bureaucracy of the executive branch also derives its notions of what is politically vital from the central culture. Only rarely does an elected official in Washington display a sufficient grasp of the central culture's workings to be able to resist it consciously and consistently. To be sure, after the 1980 elections the peripheral culture has been able to place some items on the political agenda, but the central culture has prevented the actual enactment of most of them.

The central culture realizes not only that culture defines politics, but also that political action can mold both the central and the peripheral cultures. Abortion is a case in point. Before 1972, the right to abortion on demand was preached only by parts of the radical left and by the McGovernite wing of the Democratic Party (which was decisively repudiated by the electorate that year). Shortly afterward, however, in a signal political triumph of the central culture, the Supreme Court decreed what amounted to an almost-untrammeled right to abortion. Now, thanks to the authority of that political institution, the peripheral culture has shifted toward an acceptance of what not long ago was still considered a serious moral transgression, despite the impressive efforts of the defenders of the right to life during the intervening decade. Thus, under pressure of the central culture, politics has influenced the peripheral culture. American society's view of homosexuality could undergo a similar evolution. Although the peripheral culture opposes any official recognition of this deviation from behavioral norms, the central culture works unceasingly to legitimize it through legislation forbidding discrimination on the basis of "sexual orientation." Some localities, including the nation's capital, have already adopted such laws. If similar legislation were passed at the national level and not promptly reversed, within a few years the peripheral culture might move to a much greater tolerance of homosexuality.

Of course the central culture also seeks to advance its aims through its own direct channels. For instance, it works to eliminate what it considers "sexism," largely through cultural censorship: by consciously eradicating the "sexist" assumptions of the English language, it believes it can alter the reality which that language reflects. Other elements of the central culture are also used for this purpose, as, for example, a current network television advertisement which shows a girls' volleyball team ignominiously defeating a boys' team. The central culture will not succeed entirely in its radical objectives here, for reality is more intractable than it knows; but it can move in that direction and occasion much social disruption in the process.

The liberal left in Western society has always recognized the social and political importance of culture, and it therefore has been willing to invest substantial financial resources in order to control it, ultimately for political ends. The left has invaded the nervous system of our society—the communications media. A social organism can react only to the signals it receives through that nervous system, and to the extent that the central culture controls the nervous system, it also controls the society as a whole. Beyond that, the left knows that even apolitical elements of culture can contribute to the defense of their political purposes, and so the Public Broadcasting System effectively shields its slanted public-affairs programming through the presentation of ballet and opera and poetry readings.

Traditional conservatives have been slow to awaken to the vital importance of culture as a determinant of politics. Now, however, young conservatives are finally being trained to enter the media at the bottom; resources are being invested in cultural enterprises; and publications like *Chronicles of Culture* have come into existence. The creation of a substantial alternative to the liberal central culture is a herculean task. That alternative must be extensive and impressive enough to overcome liberal influence both at the center and at the periphery, and powerful enough to form a milieu within which traditionalist political leaders can exist. The undertaking is difficult, but it is entirely worthy of those who feel the need to defend the finest accomplishments of Western civilization.

—Charles Moser

Professor Moser teaches at the George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Of Communists and Marxists

Maurice Isserman: *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party During the Second World War;* Wesleyan University Press; Middletown, CT.

William Barrett: *The Truants: Adventures Among the Intellectuals;* Anchor Press/Doubleday; New York.

by Lee Congdon

Maurice Isserman is one of the more resilient members of the radical generation that came of age during the 1960's. Although his apocalyptic ambitions were frustrated, he refused to succumb to gloom, setting out instead in search of a "tradition that could serve as both a source of political reference and an inspiration in what now was clearly to be a prolonged struggle." Under the academic tutorage of Eugene Genovese, he began to explore the history of the American Communist Party, particularly during World War II, a time when American and Russian interests temporarily converged. The result is *Which Side Were You On?,* which examines the party's naturalization and rehabilitation. It is nothing short of slander, according to Isserman, to view the party as a subversive and conspiratorial organization slavishly subservient to the dictates of Moscow. Zealots such as William Z. Foster notwithstanding, American communism has exhibited scant interest in violent revolution, concentrating its efforts instead on such eminently respectable and unexceptionable aims as the extension of civil liberty and the initiation of democratic reform. Isserman is at pains to point out, however, how often the party allied itself with FDR's New Deal and how it advanced the causes of women and blacks.

This revisionist thesis is far more charitable than that defended by Theodore Draper in his pioneering *Roots of American Communism,* where he adopted the commonsense view that during the years of Stalin's rule any Americanization of the CPUSA was simply a "response to a Russian stimulus." In order to counter this charge, Isserman has chosen to focus his attention on Earl Browder, an unlikely hero, who led the party until his fall from grace in 1945 and who, we are informed, was an Americocommunist long before the Eurocommunists appeared on the scene. Granted, he lacked the élan and celebrity of more recent radicals, but Isserman claims that he possessed an instinctive understanding of American conditions that gave a prophetic air to his pronouncements, however pedestrian they might once have seemed to a younger revolutionary generation infatuated with its own extravagant rhetoric. If he appeared to be unimaginative during the years when Hitler and Stalin were allies, he was vouchsafed a new vision after the Man of Steel met with Roosevelt and Churchill at Teheran in 1943. If Uncle Joe was willing to cooperate with

capitalist leaders, so was Browder, and, by the end of the war, this rather unassuming man had convinced himself that God—or rather History—had called him to lead the party "*away* from revolution" and toward a policy of reform that would flow gently into the mainstream of American political life. Isserman interprets this adaptation of the contemporary and temporary Soviet line as evidence of Browder's peculiar genius for perceiving that in America communism could only mean democratic socialism. Had he not been stripped of authority, Browder might even have become the "American Tito," leading his countrymen down the "American Road to Socialism." It is safe to say, I think, that Earl never had a greater admirer than Maurice.

All in all, this book is properly read as the thinly disguised autobiography of an aging and chastened radical who has renounced apocalypse now in favor of a less-hurried regeneration. Presently a word-processor operator and a dues-paying member of the United Auto Workers, Isserman is less interested in the past than in the future, for by reinterpreting the American Communist Party's dogged adherence to every shift in the Moscow line, he hopes to lay the foundation for a radical, but reformist, tradition of dissent that will no longer bear the stigma of treason. Communists, he insists, "felt no clash between their ties with the Soviet Union and their loyalty to the United States," an assertion that may be true of the brief period when the two great powers were engaged in a common struggle against nazi Germany, but one that will not wash for the years after 1945, when the Cold War obliged one to choose sides. In his eagerness to identify a native radical tradition that would refocus his own shattered vision, Isserman has contrived to portray American communism as little more than a benign trade-union movement committed to democratic goals and pro-

Dr. Congdon is professor of history at James Madison University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cesses. That he now favors a more moderate course of action is his own affair, but I doubt that party regulars will be content to be co-opted by the left wing of the Democratic Party.

William Barrett's story takes up where Isserman's leaves off—at the end of World War II, when, as a young man home from the European theater, he was introduced into the *Partisan Review* circle and soon joined the journal's editorial staff. From the first, he was impressed by the chief editors, William Phillips and Philip Rahv, and by the imposing list of contributors from both sides of the Atlantic. Moreover, as a Marxist he shared the *Review's* radical but decidedly anti-Soviet sympathies. Both Phillips and Rahv were outspoken critics of official communism, sophisticated intellectuals for whom the likes of Earl Browder simply did not exist. Yet if the Soviet Union was anathema and the American Communist Party beneath contempt, Phillips and Rahv proclaimed their allegiance to a "pure" Marxism in politics and to modernism in art, an explosive mixture that continues to possess a wide appeal, however problematic it may be.

As the years passed, Barrett's initial enthusiasm for the journal's ideology began to wane as his suspicion grew that parlor Marxism was self-deceptive and dishonestly detached. Sometime during the early 1950's, therefore, he resigned and began to fashion a distinguished career as a professor of philosophy and an intelligent interpreter of European existentialism, a tradition of thought that is uncongenial to the analytic philosophers who populate American departments of philosophy. With uncommon insight, Barrett recognized that Jean-Paul Sartre, the most famous of the existentialists, was not to be taken seriously as a philosopher and early on he turned his attention to Martin Heidegger, the single most influential thinker of the 20th century. In splendid works such as *Time of Need* and *The Illusion of Technique,* Barrett explored such famous Heideggerian themes as the problematic nature of technology and the quest of Being. Above all, however, he has pursued Heidegger's—and Nietzsche's and Dostoevski's—insight that the greatest problem confronting our age is that of nihilism, the paralyzing conviction that life is without meaning.

Anyone as familiar with modern literature as Barrett is must have peered again and again into the abyss of Nothingness, for at the heart of modernism there lies the conviction, or at least the abiding suspicion, that ours is an absurd world. Thus, in an otherwise affectionate chapter, Barrett takes the late Lionel Trilling to task for having preferred E. M. Forster and Jane Austen to Dostoevski, Kafka, Joyce, and Proust. Without denying the merits of the more conventional novelists, he knows that Dostoevski "reaches into regions of the human spirit that are not to be found in Jane Austen." *The Possessed* and *Crime and Punishment* belong to our world, one in which naked souls search for each other and hunger for some meaning beyond the conventionalities of civilized behavior, however vital to public order they may be. In part, of course, it is the breakdown of manners and morals in the age of democracy that has brought us face to face with the Void. As Barrett points out in *Time of Need,* we are akin to Hemingway's characters, for whom social conventions scarcely exist; thus left to our own devices, we too can be brought to utter that blasphemous parody of the Lord's Prayer that Hemingway wrote for "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place": "Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name."

It is against the background of Barrett's searching philosophic and human concerns that one should read *The Truants,* for the book is in essence a quiet meditation on the nihilistic mind of our century. Looking back on Rahv and other members of the old *Partisan Review* circle, Barrett is now particularly struck by the "negative" or nihilistic character of their thinking. Like so many intellectuals of our time, their intelligence was largely destructive and their capacity for infectious enthusiasm and joyous affirmation exceedingly limited. Though never fully conscious of their spiritual emptiness, they were sensitive enough to know that they suffered from a profound and by no means purely personal malaise.

In his effort to provide a phenomenological description of this malaise, Barrett rightly emphasizes the disappearance of God and the attendant secularization of our culture. As Ivan Karamazov confided to his brothers, if God is dead, everything is permitted; with that recognition, according to Camus, the moral and intellectual history of our time begins. Barrett has always been fascinated by the question of faith, and he is impatient with Heidegger's well-known reluctance to consider moral and religious questions. While the great German thinker meditated in majestic solitude, Barrett saw that "the number who suffocate from the sense of meaninglessness increases day by day." Increasingly, therefore, Barrett read and pondered the peculiarly contemporary work of William James, for the American philosopher was alive to the peril of nihilism and to the consequent importance of religion. Like James, Barrett is possessed of a genuine will to believe and is persuaded that the path to personal and public renewal must finally lead back to the holy and the sacred. To be sure, his is a dim religious vision colored by, but quite distinct from, his Christian heritage. With Yeats, he believes that some rough beast "slouches towards Bethlehem to be born," that some new revelation is at hand, but he insists that the Word cannot be received until we achieve a preparatory reconciliation with nature, from which we have become alienated by technology and by our profane and instrumental obsession with manipulation and exploitation. In the final analysis, he wrote in *The Illusion of Technique,* "we shall have to find ourselves within nature before God is able to find us."

It is a beginning and by no means a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bad one, but Barrett may be excessively pessimistic about the possibilities of a more-traditional religious experience in the modern world. He himself reports that whenever he enters his study, he makes the sign of the cross, the familiar symbol of sacrifice and redemption. Although he is not quite certain why he performs this daily ritual, it might not be too much to suggest that for him and not a few others the symbols of Christianity are not yet completely dead and that the ancient faith may still offer a more authentic life than any adumbrated by some vague, hoped-for revelation. As Dostoevski, Eliot, and others have already demonstrated, modernism and Christianity are not necessarily incompatible and, if the Messiah has come, there is no good reason to continue to wait for Godot. At the end, even Heidegger asked for and received a Christian burial.

In any event, Barrett is certainly right when he maintains that man "is the religious animal" and when he suggests that the notorious appeal of social revolution to modern intellectuals is very often in compensation for their loss of faith. Haunted by the specter of nihilism, they invest everything in the quixotic effort to achieve a total regeneration of society. Barrett witnessed this transference when he worked for the *Partisan Review,* and years of reflection have only strengthened his conviction that his fellow intellectuals "aspire to bring about heaven on earth for the dream of heaven they have lost." It is not, to be sure, a novel insight, but it is one that Barrett has purchased at some cost, having once been mesmerized by what Michael Polanyi called the magic of Marxism. In his ongoing personal and philosophic search for a renewal of faith, Barrett has been a particularly thoughtful and courageous example to modern secular intellectuals. □

Sighting Sylphs and Stalking Sense

Annie Dillard: *Living by Fiction;* Harper & Row; New York.

Leon Edel: *Stuff of Sleep and Dreams: Experiments in Literary Psychology;* Harper & Row; New York.

by Gary S. Vasilash

One of the primary functions of literary criticism is to impose a certain order on the subject, the text. In a very basic sense, it can be thought of as a set of instructions for the reader of the text, not unlike those packed along with a dishwasher or a swing set. However, there is a significant difference in that there are several ways to come at a text and only one way to screw part *A* into part *C*. Still, a reader goes to a critic for some insight or for an aid to understanding about what something means or how it works. Trust is implied in the relationship between reader and critic, just as it is in the case of the owner of a new product and the technical writer who wrote the instructions. Should the owner find that a part can't be manipulated as described (or should a part be missing), he is angered, not so much out of frustration as betrayal. Similarly, the same sort of thing is sought in a critic. If the critic is a structuralist, then the critical work should be entirely in that mode; he or she should remain within the parameters imposed. The set must be intact, which means that the critic, from the start, must have certain values upon which to construct the interpretation. Without this foundation, there is nothing but foundering. The literary text itself may seem totally variegated and protean, but if it is a conscious design, as it must be if it is to be art, then the critic, working from an established base, should be able to find and describe the arrangement; he or she can order the text. The cardinal virtue of a critic is coherence; conversely, the mortal sin is intellectual tumult.

Annie Dillard would, in light of her approach to criticism in *Living by Fiction,* write an incomprehensible instruction manual in lucid prose. In her essays there is no fidelity to anything save wobbling. Basically, in this work Ms. Dillard is promoting those who she terms "contemporary modernists." Not one to limit herself, she includes Borges, Nabokov, Beckett, Coover, Barth, Hawkes, Burroughs, Barthelme, Pynchon, Wurlitzer, Disch, Robbe-Grillet, Baumbach, Hjorstberg, O'Brien, Calvino, Landolfi, Cortázar, Puig, Canetti, and Fuentes in her initial list of who's who. Although Ms. Dillard feels that it is her task as an author to oppose the deleterious effects of entropy as described in the Second Law of Thermodynamics (i.e., she believes, with R. Buckminster Fuller, that people order things—build bridges and write novels—and so counteract the falling apart of everything else), she contributes to it by willy-nilly adding to her list: Grass, Simmons, Ondaatje, etc. Soon it's unclear who *isn't* a contemporary modernist. And nothing ties the group together, except for her lists.

However, one way to understand what she thinks this assortment of writers has in common is to see what she opposes it to. The following passage includes a most-clear statement of her stance.

> In the traditional novel, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European novel, 'character' means man or woman in society. Central characters in the Stendhal novel, the Dickens novel, the James novel, interest themselves in blood, money, and advancement to an extent that is simply staggering to anyone who approaches literature through formal methods appropriate to modernism. Where is

Mr. Vasilash is associate editor of the Chronicles.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> the art? Where is the metaphysics? These characters, and presumably their authors as well, are more interested in man's cash assets than in his bargaining with eternity.

She adds for the sake of contrast, "To Beckett characters, Borges characters, Nabokov characters, society does not exist," and, "the jolly picaros, and Calvino's Cosimo . . . and the various axolotls, dinosaurs, cows, etc., which I have mentioned [as examples of modern characters], have on their minds other things than marrying money." The only things that unify this snippet of criticism are (1) Ms. Dillard's opposition to, presumably, bourgeois society, what she perceives as the infatuation of several 19th-century novelists, and (2) curious readings of Stendhal, Dickens, James, Beckett, and Nabokov. To ask for the location of art in Stendhal's novels is like asking for the location of the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel. Dickens was certainly conscious of the poorhouse, but it's more accurate to say that his concern was with what he considered justice rather than solvent marriages. James's novels pay more than passing attention to epistemology. The three 19th-century novelists were concerned with moving their characters through England and France, America and Italy. Still, the psychology of character is more important than the state of society, though that psychology is, as the novelists noted, affected by society. They are not total solipsists, but which characters in fiction are? Of the characters of Beckett, Borges, and Nabokov, the only one that immediately comes to mind for whom society plays, seemingly, a small role is Beckett's the Unnamable, yet even it is not totally self-referential, as it describes itself with regard to Molloy, Moran, Murphy, etc. Ms. Dillard's observation "You do not read Nabokov as a document of the times" brings into doubt certain elementary reading skills: if *Lolita* isn't a document of America in the 1950's, what is it, a carefully crafted soft-core porno novel?

Other 19th-century novelists—Zola, in particular—and their heirs in the 20th also receive blows, though ambivalent ones, from Ms. Dillard. She says, "If someone out there is writing a purely naturalist fiction, using only nineteenth century techniques, he is not so much a chicken with his head cut off as a dead horse." The techniques she proposes as required are those "developed sixty years ago" but which, curiously, "have been around for centuries, even, if you want to go back to Sterne." (While this could simply be a semantic problem, the entire structure of her work here is so unsteady that that possibility is slight.) As Ms. Dillard doesn't want to be offensive, and as her ex-thoroughbred metaphor is a strong one, she finds herself in a bit of a mess, recognizing that Saul Bellow, for example, doesn't produce Joycean tomes. Her solution is to pretend that she didn't say what she did by concluding, "There are abundant differences between naturalist fiction and contemporary modernist fiction. But there are simply too many writers and works of fiction which do excellent things in both categories for any one to talk about revolution or even opposing schools." All of this happens within three pages. Did anyone say anything about dead horses?

Ms. Dillard plays fast and loose, and the result is incoherence. At one point she maintains that there is a distinct difference between writing and painting ("Since words necessarily refer to the world, as paint does not . . .") then, at another point, she describes the writer as painter: "He manipulates words like so many dabs of paint." Readers are said to "believe in the fiction writer as Paul Bunyan"—strong, bigger than life—but she states earlier, "People still regard novelists as helpless, fascinating neurotics." Curious. All kinds of things happen to Sam Beckett in Ms. Dillard's handling. She lists him in one place (as shown before) with the contemporary modernists, which she opposes with the "historical Modernists," such as Kafka, Joyce, and Faulkner, whom she rightly notes are dead. Later in the book she generates another list, one of the Modernists, and not only does she add the name of the previously condemned Henry James, but she prematurely places Beckett amongst the shades. Beckett, she says, is among the writers of "elaborated, painterly prose" (the tempera slips in again); a few pages later he is used as an example of a writer who produces "plain writing": "It is sparing in its use of adjectives and adverbs; it avoids relative clauses and fancy punctuation; it forswears exotic lexicons and attention-getting verbs; it eschews splendid metaphors and cultured allusions." It is everything painterly prose isn't. Although

LIBERAL CULTURE

Maternal Devotion in the Abstract

In a recent interview the lowbrows' favorite maven on social developments, Phil Donahue, made this revolutionary observation:

> I think we can alter society if we can enlighten parents regarding the enormously important role they play in early childhood.

At this point his female interviewer, Ms. Gloria Steinem, a noted structuralist, laudingly responded:

> Well, you've made a big difference to women, like me, who were on the other side of the television set.

Ms. Steinem acquired visibility as a vehement advocate of careers as more fulfilling for women than motherhood and as an indefatigable champion of tax-supported day-care centers as a substitute for parental attention. Well, as Emerson said, consistency *is* the hobgoblin of little minds. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Beckett's texts do span various styles, there's something suspect about Ms. Dillard's pronouncements.

Theoretically, Ms. Dillard is a serious critic: she is a novelist and a Pulitzer Prize winner in the nonfiction category. She makes a call for serious criticism, which she thinks will save fiction from the "large and paying audience whose tastes serve to keep it traditional"—to revive dead horses. She is most laudatory to formalist approaches to texts. A critic—especially a formalist—must make deep readings of works, particularly those which are as complex as the contemporary modernists's. But serious critic Dillard's readings are not depth-plumbing. She says, "The context into which a work is received actually affects its meaning (despite a century's valuable efforts by formalist critics), and this context can be manipulated." Her example of such manipulation is an unscrupulous publisher touting a detective novel by an unknown as a must for "everyone who loved *Ficciones, In the Labyrinth,* or *Harmonium."* Ms. Dillard, for example, of course. She continues, "Would the actual content of the novel, in such a context, acquire new meaning? I think so. I would be the first to fall for it. My review would read the narrative as an enormous metaphor for the search for epistemological certainty." Such an admission from any seemingly intelligent person is frightening. But when a person who sets herself up in the position of a serious analyzer of literature readily confesses ("the first to fall for it") that her reading of a given text is based primarily on what is nothing more than a sales gimmick, fright is tempered with disgust. Another comment from Annie Dillard can serve to sum up the difference between whatever it is that she is (a propagandist for contemporary modernism, perhaps) and a bona fide serious critic like Leon Edel: "The novel is a game or a joke between author and reader." Such a reduction of the efforts that many devote their lives to, admittedly with varying degrees of success, demonstrates, in itself, a peculiar sense of humor.

Thomas Babington Macaulay's description notwithstanding, Dr. Johnson has come to the present as a monument in the history of letters, both physically and with regard to his dictums, which seem to have been cold chiseled into living stone. Boswell, the source for this interpretation, of course, was kind to his mentor. More recent biographers, such as John Wain, have made their examinations with a more relentless eye, which is only natural, given their proximity to the subject; Johnson was a very vital presence to the young, absorbing Scot. Still, Boswell's *Life* remains the de facto standard portrait. Johnsonians—even those who like to think themselves very modern skeptical types—turning to Johnson's *Diaries, Prayers, and Annals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), can't help but be abashed by the raw presentation of the man: praying, pleading, agonizing. Even if the notorious *"De pedicis et manicis insana cogitatio"* is overlooked, it is still pellucid that the Rambler wasn't the mainstay he is typically thought to be. In a similar manner, Jonathan Swift is often treated as the author of a book that's typically available with cartoon pictures of a giant and little people, not as a dark, complex individual who went so far as to predict mental breakdown in a poem about his own death. It is commonplace to say that there is more to an author than meets the eye, yet even when his or her life is documented for biography or that author's works mined for symbols, there is often a hesitancy to go behind the author's eye, into the mind, the place from which the work of imagination has sprung, fully armed or barely clothed. Some of those who do, like Leon Edel, perform something that Edel calls "literary psychology." He defines that practice as "The adaptation of psychology and psychoanalytic concepts to the study of mankind's ability to create and use myths and symbols, in essence a study—without therapeutic purpose—of what literature *expresses* of the human being who creates it." Obviously, a writer of creative texts works with the stuff of his or her life, whether in blatant or subtle ways. Edel carefully reads texts and compares certain elements in them against elements drawn from the author's life. As he is well versed in both literature and psychology, his observations and conclusions, while not always acceptable to one who makes another reading, are invariably plausible.

In general, what is dangerous about literary psychology is that unskilled practitioners undermine its viability. These humbugs are usually reductive in that they apply significant meanings to things that have simple, obvious explanations. For example, a dime-store literary psychologist might interpret a character's putting on of a necktie in terms of that garment as a penis, when it is actually nothing more than an act described to show that the character wants to be socially acceptable. Using a pencil, speaking into a microphone, flying in a jet plane, and various other acts are also ripe for reduction to the sexual by these poseurs. Edel avoids such ridiculous statements in *Stuff of Sleep and Dreams* and elsewhere; he is a scholar who knows what to look for and who knows how to describe what he discovers. That is, he avoids the use of terms that are no more than cant in the mouths of mawkish guests on the "Donahue" show, authors and/or psychologists who have all the answers to what one of them calls "acute reality problems."

One jargonlike word that Edel does employ is *tristimania,* which was coined by Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signatory to the Declaration of Independence and the father of American psychology. According to Edel, Rush used the word to describe "agitated forms of depression." Says Edel of the word: "It may be inaccurate in a diagnostic sense; yet I find it has descriptive value. It helps describe the component of depression in art, for nothing is more chronic among writers than their sadness." In *Stuff of Sleep and Dreams* he provides case studies—of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Joyce, James, Eliot, Woolf, and others—which show this to be true. Outstanding writers are not the kind of people who would be located on the hump of a statistician's bell-shaped curve showing "normal" behavior; they would be close to the edge. Think of Johnson and Swift, those who Edel deals with, and others, from Milton to Beckett.

Something is notable in Edel's examinations because of its absence: the authors he deals with are all dead; there are no living writers scrutinized. This could be simply explained by the fact that his field of study happens to be, primarily, the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, there is another possibility. The fast and loose manipulators of post-Freudian psychology have perverted all societal norms to the point of virtual nonexistence by claiming that it is essential to "do your own thing" and by absolving all guilt for crimes committed by blaming not the responsible party but "environmental factors." It is impossible to imagine Henry James or T.S. Eliot spouting the nihilistic phrase "Do it if it feels good," yet it is quite easy to imagine those words—or a slight variation—from Norman Mailer or Gore Vidal. Whereas writers once recognized the necessity of propriety and so infused their art with their tension, many writers of today simply masturbate in public: sex, politics, acting, pugilistics, etc. Nothing is left for their literary works. Thus the vapidity of Ms. Dillard's contemporary modernists, which is most apparent when examined in the light of Edel's subjects. Of the living writers Ms. Dillard deals with at length in her book, Borges and Beckett are, perhaps, the only two who will leave behind a rich, sustaining corpus of works, which is due, in part, to their having backgrounds in which tradition means something more ancient than what happened yesterday. □

Speculations on a Tendentious Science

Garry Wills: *The Kennedy Imprisonment: A Meditation on Power;* Atlantic/Little, Brown; Boston.

James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle: *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection;* Alfred A. Knopf; New York.

François Kersaudy: *Churchill and de Gaulle;* Atheneum; New York.

by John C. Caiazza

It is a widespread belief that we can learn lessons from reading history. Of course, it is not often said *what* it is that we can learn, and historians are divided as to what the lessons of history really are. The opinion of most seems to be that we should read history in order to observe its ironies. That is, no general patterns, no indication of design, no final triumph or final defeat of the human spirit seems to be registered there, only the frustrations of actors working at cross-purposes, and the unintended consequences of policies once set in motion. The fact is that in reading history, people get out of it what they put into it. If history is a science, it is the most tendentious of sciences; while the facts of history may be inarguable, their meaning is not. For example, what a Marxist historian and a Catholic historian get out of their respective readings of the history of Europe's Middle Ages is not a different set of facts, but different lessons: the Marxist sees that technological, i.e., material, conditions brought about the transition from a feudal to a capitalist economy; the Catholic learns that all of Europe is a single social entity brought into being under the auspices of the Church. On more local grounds, we often find conservatives comparing the current state of America to that of Rome before the Fall, while liberals compare it to that of Weimar Germany just before the rise of nazism. We all learn, it seems, our favorite lessons from history, but they are *our* lessons, not history's, in an objective sense.

A good example of how not to find lessons in history is Garry Wills's *The Kennedy Imprisonment,* a tendentious and vulgar book, albeit a highbrow one. It is, of course, about the Kennedy family, chiefly John Fitzgerald Kennedy. This is a JFK recognizable, though, only to readers of scandal mags, right-wing tracts and revisionist historians: a phony, a womanizer, a creature of his father's public-relations machinery, a man who would subject his nation to mortal danger in order to retain political power and give himself psychological reassurance. Wills has culled negative comments from sources ranging from conservative critics of his foreign policy to Judith Exner Campbell and worked them into a complex pattern of cultural and historical explanation. The book is organized into five parts: "Sex," "Family," "Image," "Charisma," and "Power," each consisting of three or more chapters. Significantly, since it spells out the message of the book, the final chapter in each part is entitled, "The Prisoner of . . ." as in "The Prisoner of Sex." Thus, the saga of the Kennedy family (especially JFK) is presented as sordid and essentially self-defeating, a venture in futility. "Johnny we hardly knew ye," indeed.

Why has Wills turned his heavily intellectualized style on the Kennedys and JFK in particular? A number of reasons suggest themselves. First, Wills has always shown an ability to take an off-centered view of a subject to show it in a new and interesting light. In this, he takes after G.K. Chesterton, whom Wills admires and often quotes, and about whom he wrote his first book. However, Chesterton, who was famous for his oxymorons and seeming non se-

Dr. Caiazza is an administrator for the University of Massachusetts at Boston.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quiturs and paradoxes, produced a body of writing structured on strong convictions, but he also wrote for fun as well as to make a point in an unexpected way. The moving force behind Wills's writing seems to be an insatiable quest for personal status, which gives his work a smart-alecky tone that is totally lacking in Chesterton. Another possibility is that Wills, as a Catholic, is offended by the fact that John Kennedy was a patently bad Catholic. There is a final reason, however. Wills's savaging of JFK takes its place with other recent books on American presidents, particularly Ronnie Duggar's on Lyndon Johnson and Seymour Hersh's forthcoming tome on Richard Nixon. These books have two things in common: first, to a degree nearly unprecedented in serious political analysis, they relate the most sordid details of their subjects' personal lives; second, in each case the author is fiercely opposed to American foreign policy as it has been conducted since 1945. But none offers a realistic alternative. Each sees our foreign policy as anticommunist, imperialistic, dirty, immoral. While they say this at some length, what can they offer as an alternative to a policy of anticommunism? After all, there is no denying the aggressive nature of Soviet foreign policy, nor the kind of semidarkness that constitutes life under a communist regime. So writers like Hersh, Duggar, and Wills are reduced to trading in tittle-tattle on the order of the *Midnight Star* and the old *Confidential* magazine. Nixon tipsy at a Florida nightclub, LBJ afraid that college would sissify him, Rose Kennedy gamely hiding her knowledge of Joe Senior's infidelities: these are the details that make up the narratives of our new class of historians. Wills can scarcely bring himself to stop detailing the sexual escapades of the Kennedys; he even notes one about Prime Minister Asquith of England because Asquith was of a class of men—the English ruling class—that JFK admired.

The themes of Kennedy sex/family/image/charisma all merge one into another and lead inevitably into the last theme of Kennedy power—American foreign policy, in Wills's view. For him they are all the same, and the only reason he can see for JFK's anticommunism is that he had to uphold the Kennedy image of cool daring and macho exploitation by going *mano à mano* with Fidel

Castro and Nikita Khrushchev. He reduces the motives for JFK's foreign policy to the personal need of Kennedy and other members of his administration to fulfill some dirty psychological necessity. The John Kennedy whom Wills describes is a man trying to establish his manhood by playing around with women and by pushing around the Russians. Such a correlation not only smacks of puny post-Freudian platitudes, but as a method of analysis it also obscures the main motives of American foreign policy since 1945 and leads Wills into contortions of interpretation. As proof of Kennedy's eagerness to humiliate the Russians, for instance, he cites the fact that we refused to dismantle our missile bases in Turkey but insisted that Khrushchev remove Russian missiles from Cuba. Why should *we* have missiles in Turkey when they cannot have theirs in Cuba, Wills wants to know. Missing from Wills's discussion of the Cuban crisis is any sense that the Soviet Union has trampled into naught every previous treaty and agreement, that America is morally right in resisting communist expansion because communism is an evil and totalitarian system. Wills apparently sees that notion as proof of America's bilious pride.

There is a particular conception of power, its morality, and America's use of it behind Wills's attack on the Kennedy family; indeed, the book is subtitled *A Meditation on Power.* It is worth examining this conception because it has recently become a powerful influence in debate and discussion about American foreign policy. It is not all that new, however, for the late Jesuit scholar John Courtney Murray described it in *We Hold These Truths* over 20 years ago:

> Most Americans seem to have finally awakened to the central relationship between foreign policy and force. But the awakening was to a state of moral bafflement and anxiety, insofar as it took place in the climate or moral opinion . . . [in which] a cold breath of evil more than faintly emanates from the very words 'power' and 'force.' It seems to have been a part of the American dream that this nation could go through history with clean hands by the simple Kantian expedient described in Peguy's genial phrase: 'Kantianism has clean hands, because it has no hands.' Concretely, a nation's 'hands,' wherewith it shapes the stuff of history, are its instruments of power—military, economic, and diplomatic power, together with the power of sheer presence and prestige. We have never wanted to have such hands. . . . Now we have become suddenly conscious of our hands—that they are sinewy beyond comparison, that they are sunk in the affairs of the world; that they are getting dirty beyond the wrists.

Given this attitude it becomes impossible to detect any moral difference between our foreign policy aims and those of the Russians. An anticommunist for-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eign policy starts as a moral embarrassment and becomes a psychological impossibility. This attitude has grown stronger in the last 20 years with the trauma of Vietnam, which may explain why no JFK admirer has come forward to defend him. How could they: the same people who supported JFK now claim that Reagan's budget provides too many guns and not enough butter. JFK's anti-communism ("we shall bear any burden . . .") has become an embarrassment to the liberals who once supported him.

One final point on Wills's concept of the morality of power: unlike many others who share his attitude, he is no moral relativist. Wills is a Catholic who believes that the only moral validation a nation may claim is that it permits its citizens to live in relative peace. Thus, a claim of moral righteousness can never be a legitimate basis of foreign policy, and the duty of the truly righteous among us is to recognize the moral vacuity of American foreign policy and to denounce it. Wills seems to share the idea that the United States should unilaterally renounce nuclear weapons; then, either the Russians would do the same or the Chinese would attack them. Such are the lessons of history that Wills and others on the left have learned from the war in Southeast Asia.

Of course, if anyone is expected to learn lessons from history, it is the historians themselves. These lessons would not be answers to large questions about meaning, which might provide a plan for American policies, but about the technical issues involved in the writing of history—the evaluation of certain types of documentary evidence, for example. *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* by James Davidson and Mark Lytle explicitly intends to draw lessons on the technical questions of writing history. Each chapter describes an episode in American history chosen to illustrate a particular problem or technique of the practicing historian. The book also has the aim of interesting readers in written history—which the authors perceive no longer appeals to people the way it once did. The story of abolitionist John Brown, for instance, is written as psychohistory to show the use of Freudian analysis in the writing of historiography; the development of the A-bomb is used to illustrate how historians must appreciate the influence of bureaucracies to understand decision-making; Andrew Jackson's career is used to illustrate how theories, in this case the frontier theory, guide the historians' selection of facts. There is a peculiar sensation in rereading about these events, so familiar to us and yet told in a new way. To see in the career of Huey Long not just the familiar story of the Southern demagogue but an illustration of the "Great Man" theory is to gain a new perspective on American history that raises it from the local and parochial to the universal. *After the Fact,* written by two young historians with Yale pedigrees, is interesting and well written and will reacquaint the reader with significant events in a new and refreshing light.

If we do not really learn lessons except in a technical sense, and otherwise tend to see only what we bring to our observation of history, then how can history be of use to us? The answer may lie in the fact that history can be a living tradition as well as a set of facts or a historical narrative, and can thus influence our thoughts and actions. This kind of history is experienced—felt, not read, or at least felt after it is read. It constitutes a "usable past" because it becomes an extension of our personal memories. Washington at Valley Forge, Lee and Grant at Gettysburg, MacArthur in the Philippines are not simply events in American military history; they form a tradition which, when imbibed, will inspire military officers in the 21st century. François Kersaudy's *Churchill and de Gaulle* gives a clear indication of how history can function in this mode by what it tells us about its subjects. It provides a clear portrayal of these men which, while concentrating on their personal relationship, also enables the reader to see the kind of men they were and the historical forces against which they worked. Churchill and de Gaulle were both deeply immersed in the histories of their respective nations, which helped form their consciousness of the role that they and their nations should play in World War II. De Gaulle's France and Churchill's England, as they perceived them, had special places as originators and protectors of the best of the Western tradition of civility. They literally *made history,* not just by learning lessons from it but by creating a historical memory for future generations. The people who only learned from history were the designers of appeasement and Vichy, for they had learned the lessons of World War I. Alas, they were the wrong lessons.

Historical knowledge is not only the knowledge of the past; it is also the kind of knowledge which enables us to use the past as guide for the future. Yet, if we do not learn lessons from it, how can history guide us? Ironically, a passage from Garry Wills's *Confessions of a Conservative* explains it:

> Insofar as we steer rationally toward the future, we do so by our rear-view mirror. There is no windshield, because there is nothing to 'see' up ahead. We go forward by seeing backward. By tracing the trajectory of past events we extrapolate to future positions. . . . The best guides to the future are those whose knowledge of the past is broadest and deepest, who are most cautious and aware of complexity, least confident that they can 'see' something up ahead. □

Send for your complimentary copy of The Rockford Institute's 1982 Annual Report featuring the work of the eminent artist and designer Warren Chappell. Write to The Rockford Institute, 934 N. Main Street, Rockford, Illinois 61103.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Missives About Man

***Selected Letters of James Thurber;* Edited by Helen Thurber and Edward Weeks; Little, Brown; Boston.**

***The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien;* Edited by Humphrey Carpenter with Christopher Tolkien; Houghton Mifflin; Boston.**

by Carson Daly

Today we hear a great deal about culture. To judge from what we read, it can be almost anything and can be unearthed almost anywhere. There are, for example, physical, pop, ethnic, religious, aesthetic, academic, folk, popular, teenage, European, Latin, Asiatic, and American cultures—to name just a few. Various forms of it can be spotted on Carnaby Street in London, in New York's Harlem, or under the desert sands in the royal burial chamber of the Pharaoh. Moreover, culture has been reduced to a hotly desired "commodity" that can be used to sell almost anything—houses, clothes, food, books, cameras. Culture, it seems, is de rigueur for the up-and-coming person in the 80's.

In the past, culture was generally thought to be an outgrowth of religious doctrines, historical circumstances, governmental administration, social mores, and literary, artistic, and musical developments. A cultured person was often considered to be a well-traveled individual who was broadly educated in the humanities. This person was, above all, a gentle man or woman and the product of a civilized, Judeo-Christian tradition. This view of culture and of the cultured individual has all but disappeared. It has been replaced in many quarters by the vulgar notion that culture can be acquired like objets d'art—and the proposed mode of acquisition is nearly as disturbing as this concept. The guiding principle of such a mentality is osmosis. One does not actually work at learning languages or appreciating art or reading the classics; instead, one reads critics on these subjects and adopts their views. Unfortunately, those critics are generally the voices of what can only be called the pseudoculture. These sirenlike voices call to the culturally deprived, offering them a chance to be among the beau monde if they but subscribe to *The New Yorker,* jog, eat health food, shop at Bloomingdale's, learn snatches of three modern languages, and memorize the Greek alphabet. This is hardly culture. It is not the glory that was Greece or the grandeur that was Rome. It is not even the authentic grime of Harlem or the grotesquerie of 42nd Street. It is the ethos of Berlitz and the ontology (such as it is) of Madison Avenue.

Yet this view of culture is disseminated throughout the media and is manifest in the degeneration of the family, the decay of social inhibitions, and in a generally fast, egomaniacal "lifestyle." The kind of ersatz commodity that grows out of these circumstances is powerless to satisfy the hunger of the human spirit for a real, organic, traditionally based culture. In fact, our rejection of, but instinctive desire for, this kind of culture is a major topic of modern music, art, and literature. Even such art forms as the rock song and the soap opera record this inchoate desire.

Not surprisingly, much of modern literature testifies to the desperate need to maintain Western culture against the onslaught of modern mores. The recently published letters of James Thurber and of J.R.R. Tolkien, two impressive but very different men, make this same point in diverse but unequivocal ways.

Throughout Thurber's letters to friends, novelists, editors, doctors, and strangers, he never mentions culture explicitly. Nevertheless, all that he draws and writes is conditioned by his reliance upon it. He intuitively understands that without culture and the moral strictures upon which it is based there can be no humor and, therefore, none of the hilarious cartoons or witty stories at which he excelled. This is not to say that he was a Bible-beating enthusiast or an adamant sectarian. Far from it. He seems to have recognized religious enthusiasm in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek manner, as when he wrote to E.B. White: "Over here [England] everybody turns Catholic when anything is the matter and perhaps you should try that. T.S. Eliot turned Catholic and so did Evelyn Waugh and they look fine." Thurber recognized that a world devoid of a code of fundamental decency, order, and ethics is anything but a funny place to live. Moreover, in such a world where nothing is normative, there can be no humorous plays on the unanticipated, the unlikely, the ironic, the incongruous, the bizarre, the grotesque, and the outrageous because none of them is a departure from the regular. As Thurber cogently observes, "The old cliché 'the dignity of man' is proved in the breach. It is only when he falls down that we appreciate how straight he can stand." We might add that if he never stands, we cannot appreciate the humor or the tragedy of his fall.

Thurber makes this same point in various ways throughout the letters—most notably in his comments on Henry James and modern mores and on living in New York. In the first instance, the humorist notes that the kind of drama that James could achieve is no longer available to the modern writer because society has lost much of its horror of unprincipled behavior:

> What a nicely glowing point of honor he put upon two people for giving up Love for a principle! It seems so far-away in this day when we give up principles for Love—and somehow the Love they gave up seems, God help us all, rather more worth the

Dr. Daly is professor of English at the University of Notre Dame.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RELIEF FROM

MAGAZINE MUSH AND ME-TOOISM

Each issue of *Chronicles of Culture* provides those who thought the days of vital, compelling writing were past with evidence to the contrary.

You, dear reader, may insure the continued feeling of cerebral well-being that comes from absorbing the contents of each issue simply by detaching the card that accompanies this page and forwarding it—filled in—along with your check.

In return, your steadfast editors agree to send you a year's supply of *Chronicles of Culture*—12 issues brimming with an articulate mix of criticism, review, and comment.

Our promise: to deliver a continuous supply of original and precise thinking and writing. No small task, but one in which we exult—so that you may, too.

Chronicles of Culture

The decidedly articulate antidote to magazine mush and me-tooism.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

having, and the principles not so much.

As much as Thurber lived and achieved in New York City, he seems to have considered life there a kind of manic existence which could ultimately destroy health, happiness, sanity, and finally humor. He describes it as:

> A city made of steel and cement, with very few trees, and such trees as they are, paltry and vulgar, sad and almost sordid, a city in which it is possible to live for weeks and move around for miles without seeing green grass and blue sky and never to hear crickets or frogs or silence can have the same unavoidable effect as a shell from a gun.

He goes on to compare New York to the battlefield of Verdun and concludes that it is "imperative not to live there," if for no other reason than such a life is funny only when viewed as abnormal—from the outside and at a distance.

Although Tolkien, the famous creator of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and a sometime don at Oxford, never lived in New York, he too was well aware of the difficulty of protecting culture amidst the megapolitan technocracy. His life's vocation—the study of "dead" languages and of Nordic and Anglo-Saxon literature—attests to his dismay at the modern tone in the arts. His deep adherence to the Catholic Church and his belief in the sacraments betokens his aversion to a laissez-faire morality. But most of all, Tolkien's creation of an entirely original fantasy universe indicates not only his distaste for the modern condition but also his absolute belief in the necessity of a cultural context for the creation of a great literary work.

For Tolkien, as for Thurber, the chief criterion of a cultural context was a moral framework. The former believed that there could be neither fruitful life nor great art without at least an attempted adherence to a strict code of behavior. For him, concepts like love, honor, loyalty, and self-sacrifice were not the beliefs of dupes but the armor of saints, the virtues of heroes, the heart of all great stories, and the food of the soul's imaginings. Tolkien believed that the heart of all great stories was not simply a moral, ethical, or even Christian context; he was convinced that the paradigm for all stories, and therefore for all lives, was that of man's fall from grace. He asserts: "There cannot be any 'story' without a fall—all stories are ultimately about the fall—at least not for human minds as we know them and have them."

The fall, however, is not the whole story. Tolkien believed that the paradigm was completed only with the redemption of man after the fall. To describe the "key" to life and literature he coined the term "eucatastrophe," meaning a good catastrophe. The author defined this word as "the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears . . . [a] Christian joy which produces tears because it is qualitatively so like sorrow, because it comes from those places where Joy and Sorrow are at one, reconciled, as selfishness and altruism are lost in Love."

But Tolkien, who was vitally concerned with literature, and Thurber, who devoted his life to humor, were poignantly aware that man can neither laugh nor cry in a world without a rich cultural context. Moreover, as their letters show, they realized that the richest of cultural contexts grows only out of a strict ethical code. For Thurber this code was the backboard against which he bounced his salvos and volleys of outrageous wit. For Tolkien it was a mold which gave shape to man's otherwise formless sufferings. For both men, morals gave more than shape: they also gave (in observance as well as in the breach thereof) laughter and—after eucatastrophe—ultimately joy. □

Honest & Dishonest Confusion

Brian Crozier: *The Minimum State: Beyond Party Politics;* Hamish Hamilton; London.

Edward S. Herman: *The Real Terror Network: Terrorism in Fact and Propaganda;* South End Press; Boston.

by Samuel T. Francis

Brian Crozier is known to British and American readers as a writer on the problems of political power and conflict, problems that he has explored in a series of books launched in the 1950's. Since 1978 he has become better known to Americans as a commentator on foreign affairs, succeeding James Burnham (whom Crozier acknowledges as his philosophical mentor) as the author of "The Protracted Conflict" in *National Review.* In his most recent book Crozier departs somewhat from his usual theme of internal and international conflict in order to explore the desiderata of political theory and the causes of our present discontents. The results of his effort are mixed.

The political ideal that Crozier expounds as the "minimum state" consists of a government that is able to ensure three conditions: "the safety and security of the people," "defense against internal enemies," and "the preservation of the value of money." His selection of these criteria as the sine qua non of good government is justified on the grounds that, while other conditions provided by government may be desirable, no others are possible if these three are not provided: "A government which delivers such items, yet neglects security, defense, and the currency, is a bad government." Moreover, Crozier argues, a government

Mr. Francis is a legislative assistant for national security to Senator John P. East of North Carolina and Washington editor of The Southern Partisan.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that develops beyond these three criteria, as most contemporary democratic regimes have, is not likely to fulfill the conditions of the minimum state acceptably. He devotes a large portion of his book to case studies of contemporary governments that either have failed to provide these conditions (most of the Western democracies) or have provided them untempered by any other considerations (the totalitarian or, as Crozier calls them, totalist states). Few conservatives or libertarians on either side of the Atlantic would argue with Crozier's criteria for good government or his critique of bad government. What is missing from his book is an intellectually rigorous defense of the "minimum state" and an equally exacting critique of totalitarianism.

The problem that underlies much of Crozier's projection of his ideal is that the totalist states, as he acknowledges, *do* provide the three criteria of internal order, external defense, and financial stability. Why, then, should we not prefer totalitarianism to the incipient anarchy, military weakness, and reeling economies of the Western democracies? Alas, Mr. Crozier does not provide a clear answer, and it is my contention that he, and others who are satisfied with the ideal of the minimum state *alone*, cannot do so. Of course, he has no sympathy for totalitarianism, because the "real criterion" for which he argues is that "it is virtually impossible . . . for the ordinary citizen to escape from the political process." Yet he does not elaborate on this assertion, and the universal politicization of nonpolitical and private institutions are not necessarily what Crozier (and others in the West) find most objectionable in totalitarianism. More often cited are its mass homicidal brutality and its destruction not only of political and economic freedom but also of all human qualities in its subjects. Politicization, of course, is essential to the totalitarian experiment in human engineering, but that alone is not sufficient to characterize totalitarian regimes and to distinguish them from more moderate authoritarian and constitutionalist polities. I see no reason why a high degree of politicization is incompatible with a minimum state. Indeed, it would appear to me that the preservation of a minimum state would require the most serious and continuous attention to and involvement in politics on the part of most of its citizens. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.

What distinguishes totalitarian regimes from others is the presence in the former of two things absent from the latter: (1) totalitarian regimes are animated by ideologies or political formulas that view human beings as malleable and subject to perfectibility by politically enforced means; and (2) the means by which men are to be perfected is the "Party"—a monolithic organization that destroys, subsumes, or controls all other institutions and processes. The universal politicization of totalitarian regimes on which Crozier dwells follows from these two features: if men are to be made new by political means, then all aspects of human life must be subject to and involved in political processes. The brutality of totalitarianism is also implicit in these two features: since men cannot be reinvented or molded without limit, the attempt to do so inevitably encounters failure, resistance, collective disaster, and the Party is forced to even greater levels of brutality. Since the machinery of the Party monopolizes the instruments of force and suasion, there is no meaningful balance of power or public dissent in totalitarian regimes.

Conversely, in the constitutionalist and authoritarian states of the West, there is no monolithic ruling Party, nor is there a public orthodoxy of human engineering. Such ideologies exist, of course, and exert far too much influence on the elites of the democratic regimes—which to a large extent accounts for the hypertrophy of nonessential functions as well as for the decay of necessary duties that Crozier rightly deplores. Yet precisely because they are constitutionalist and exhibit pluralistic dispersions of power, ideas, and social forces, they have been far more resistant to the ideologies of human engineering that conform to the totalitarian model. Indeed, they very often exhibit too much dispersion of independent power centers and too little orthodoxy, so that those who hold power must do so by force alone rather than through generally accepted institutions and values. It is ironic that one of Crozier's defenses of authoritarian states is that they do not generally last long—e.g., they are vulnerable to the internal instabilities that they try unsuccessfully to overcome.

This formulation, of course, is not unique, and probably few informed conservatives will seriously disagree with it. Crozier also probably agrees with it, but unfortunately he does not develop it in *The Minimum State*. He is unable to develop from his ideal a critique of totalitarianism or an adequate defense of the ideal of the minimum state. For this ideal is defensible principally on a view of human nature as fixed, not subject to reinvention, and in need of both social and political disciplines. It is a view of man that, to be sure, is not always very cheerful but one which results in far more palatable conditions than does the alternative, utopian, ultimately totalitarian view.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The conclusion must be, then, that there is some other desideratum besides the three criteria of the minimal state that Crozier reveals to us. I would suggest, without further elaboration, that this desideratum consists precisely of a public orthodoxy that views man as both fixed and flawed and of the preservation of a social and political structure fluid enough to prevent the monolithic concentration of power. It is precisely this philosophical legacy and this kind of social and political structure that characterize the West and which justify the extension of "Western" ideas to geographically non-Western polities that, successfully or not, try to emulate us rather than models that have more in common with non- or anti-Western systems. Whether Western societies will continue to exhibit these fundamental obstacles to totalitarianism remains in doubt.

The prospect of Western dissolution and incipient totalitarianism is a thing of joy to Mr. Edward S. Herman of, oddly enough, the Wharton Business School. Professor Herman's *The Real Terror Network* is intended both as a reply to Claire Sterling's 1981 *The Terror Network,* which revealed covert Soviet support for terrorist organizations and activities in Western Europe and the Middle East, and as an indictment of American "satellization" of the Third World "National Security States" (i.e., our allies). Mr. Herman's sources for his indictment include virtually every far-left lobby and think tank in the country, including the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), *Covert Action Information Bulletin,* and *Counterspy.* Among the individuals to whom he gives acknowledgements is the CIA renegade Philip Agee, and he cites a number of other denizens of the anti-American left. It is not surprising that Herman's book contains such gems as "following the death of Stalin, torture sharply declined and in many forms disappeared altogether in the Soviet Union and in the Soviet sphere of influence." He wonders, too, why people like Lech Walesa are given so much attention in the Western media while hardly anybody, it seems, notices that "serious crimes in Guatemala are suppressed." He blames the media for disseminating "claims without the slightest attempt at critical evaluation" and for waxing "hysterical with humanistic concern" over the Pol Pot genocide in Cambodia. He opines that totalitarianism is a model more applicable to the National Security States (which include Israel as well as Chile and any other ally of the United States) than to Cuba or the Soviet Union.

Perhaps the most mind-boggling part of Herman's rantings is his inclusion of the media as an element of the vast conspiracy of the CIA, the multinationals, the U.S. government, and the ubiquitous "New Right" which is seeking to control the world. He denies, of course, that his is a conspiracy theory—rather, he maintains, imperialist anticommunism is inherent in the "structure" of American society. But the denial is simply a tactic permitting him to disclaim political prejudice and still indulge in high moral dudgeon at the nefarious

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture:*

Politics & Good Taste

"Behind the debate on strategy is the realization—by both sides—that the old deterrence doctrine is dead. In truth, it probably never existed. The Soviet Union never accepted the idea of a 'mutual suicide pact,' nor did it have any compelling logic of its own. The peace was kept not by an arcane theory but by American military superiority. The ability of the U.S. to inflict devastation on the U.S.S.R. without suffering comparable damage itself (which was the condition of the balance of power through the 1950's and early 1960's) was a deterrent based on a war-fighting capability, even if it was not characterized as such at the time. It is the desire to prevent the restoration of this American superiority that motivates the international left."

—from "The Debate on Strategy"
by William R. Hawkins

"Few things are more important to the emotional well-being of humans than their sense of place, and few subjects are discussed so rarely. Perhaps because scholarship is normally an urban, if not always urbane, occupation; perhaps because the study of psychology grew in urban settings and was conducted by cosmopolitan scholars; perhaps because it is fashionable to praise cities as places of culture and see rural settings as the home of rubes, the topic has been virtually ignored. . . . A sense of place is one of the anchors that can hold our lives fast in turbulent times, remind us that there are some things that do not erode with change. Even if the place itself falls victim to the urban renewers' wrecking tools, or is replaced with a nice, profitable parking lot, the memory of it can sometimes help."

—from "The Sense of Place"
by Curtis Stadtfeld

Also:

Opinions & Views—Commendables—In Focus
Perceptibles—Waste of Money
The American Proscenium—Stage—Screen—Art—Music
Correspondence—Liberal Culture—Social Register
Journalism—In My Solitude

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plottings of the American elite. "The mass media of the United States are a part of the national power structure and they therefore reflect its biases and mobilize popular opinion to serve its interests," he declares. Thus, Herman must pretend that the major networks and newspapers are conservative, anti-communist forces. He claims that Sterling's *The Terror Network* was "heavily and uncritically reviewed by the leading media enterprises, both liberal and conservative." He does not document this assertion because it is simply not true; a collection of reviews of Sterling's book shows that it was heavily and unfairly hammered in the liberal press and somewhat critically received in some conservative organs. Professor Herman then proceeds to base his critique of Sterling almost entirely on negative reviews from the liberal media. It is in the context of his claim that the media is anticommunist that he whines about the undue attention given to the Cambodian genocide. Yet, as James Tyson shows in *Target America,* it was not until *after* the Soviets began criticizing Pol Pot (as an ally of China) that the major American media discussed the Cambodian genocide in any detail.

Professor Herman's contribution to scholarship raises an interesting problem for the contemporary leftist mind. In the 1920's and 30's, as is well known, the left in the West was deeply befuddled by the Soviet Union. From the time of John Reed and Lincoln Steffens to the Hitler-Stalin Pact, dishonest reporting coupled with Comintern propaganda and the capacity of Western intellectuals for self-deception led a lot of otherwise smart people to believe the Soviet Union was a good thing. After the Hitler-Stalin Pact, after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, after Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan, Poland, after Solzhenitsyn, no one in the West publicly defends the Soviet Union and its empire. But this change in attitudes has not led Western intellectuals to defend or praise their own society and countries or even to regard the Soviets as a source of danger. Indeed, any serious criticism of the Soviet Union or of communism is still regarded by the progressive intellectuals of the West as reactionary and imperialist. Hence the extravagant attacks on Claire Sterling, *The Spike,* President Reagan, Solzhenitsyn, and Susan Sontag, to mention only a few recent and disparate sources of anti-communist sentiment. The problem raised by books like this is: Why, if the Western left no longer idolizes the Soviet Union, does it feel obligated to denounce anyone who attacks the Soviets and even to write entire books denouncing them and their ideas? Of course, many explanations of this phenomenon have been offered, ranging from the essentially conspiratorial thesis of *The Spike* to theories about the death wish and defeatism of the contemporary leftist mind, but I doubt if anyone has developed a fully adequate explanation or solution for it.

The books by Mr. Crozier and Professor Herman represent two poles of contemporary political thought in the West. The first is valuable, but it does not, unfortunately, provide the insights or the ideas on which the West could rely to meet its external enemies or its internal betrayers. The second is absurd in its self-hatred and its blindness to the enemies of its own civilization. □

Systems of Systemlessness & Other Woes

Rainer C. Baum: *The Holocaust and the German Elite: Genocide and National Suicide in Germany, 1871–1945;* Rowman and Littlefield; Totowa, New Jersey.

by Allan C. Carlson

Germany is the extraordinary failure among modern nations. The unified *Reich,* twice in its 74-year history, set out on the path of empire. The first effort produced humiliating defeat. The second brought the Holocaust—the systematic extermination of six million Jews, as well as masses of Poles, Gypsies and other groups deemed expendable—and the nation's self-immolation.

Since the end of the second campaign, historians have spawned thousands of volumes trying to understand this unprecedented disaster. How, in the shadow of death at Treblinka, could guards and inmates share a common table, fraternize and laugh with each other and feast into the night, only to return to the grisly slaughter the next morning? How can one account for the sheer bureaucratic density of the Holocaust, where just the initial assessment of the property of Jews to be deported from Greater Germany required the filing of an eight-page questionnaire detailing possessions down to a toothbrush? How could the cultural heirs of Goethe and Beethoven exhibit such profound indifference to human suffering and death? Some go back to the anti-Judaic ravings of Martin Luther and find the Holocaust merely the culmination of the long history of German anti-Semitism. Others—most recently Helen Fein in *Accounting for Genocide*—integrate the Holocaust back into the "normal" history of man's inhumanity to man; simply a variation of the Turkish massacre of the Armenian minority or of the North Americans' near-extermination of the continent's indigenous tribes.

Sociologist Rainer Baum, in the tradition of the late Hannah Arendt, finds these explanations unsatisfactory. The "system of systemlessness" that characterized the nazi polity, he insists, is utterly unique, different even from the Soviet Gulag, where administrators could at least internally legitimate their acts as "the re-education of bourgeois minds" or "the construction of socialist society."

Dr. Carlson is editor of Persuasion at Work.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Holocaust architects could claim no such rational cover. Miss Arendt explained the German experience as reflecting "the banality of evil." In another work she traced its source to the "destratification" of elites in Germany. The "cultural middle class" employed in the civil service, she argued, bore honor but lacked corresponding wealth and political influence. Such destratification resulted in a nation of "the merely wealthy," "the merely prestigious," and "the merely powerful." Privileges were increasingly seen as "functionless," no longer serving society but only the private interests of individuals. The SS complex, Arendt suggested, exemplified such one-dimensional elites in its inability to link prestige to power. Germany's "destratification of inequalities" among elites also destroyed "the social nature of identity," both individual and collective. In such an environment, she concluded, identity became a matter of subjective, personalized choice. And morality lost any public meaning.

Professor Baum applies the insights of Max Weber and Talcott Parsons—two giants of a discipline increasingly dominated by pygmies—both to test and to go beyond Arendt's thesis. The moral indifference exhibited in the Holocaust, he states, rested on a commitment to two ideas: that in a modern society the public sphere is necessarily an amoral one; and that the "human resources" of a modern society must be used just as the nonhuman ones, unrestricted by any absolute constraints. Such viewpoints, he admits, could be found in most contemporary nations. Why did they develop a consistency in Germany that made genocide and national suicide possible? Baum cites the critical necessity of a modern nation to generate a value consensus—at least among its elites—that embodies some shared vision of the good society. Such a consensus provides the "ought" for a nation, the common and morally compelling perceptions of a desirable social order, and the framework within which measures of normality and deviance are placed. It was here, in the realm of articulating shared values, that modern Germany utterly failed.

To prove this point, Baum employs a content analysis of nearly 100 popular German novels published between 1871 and 1914. His statistical assessment of the moral judgments found in their principal themes and characters reveals that Germany was indeed a deeply divided society, a nation afflicted by "value dissensus." Divisions were most apparent regionally. "Prussians," for example, exhibited strong attachment to a corporatist, hierarchical perception of the good society. "Rhinelanders" adhered to the market model, emphasizing individual initiative and responsibility. Those in Bavaria and the Southwest (Baden-Württemburg), meanwhile, revealed *Gemeinschaft* or socially integrative, traditionally "Catholic" values. Neither socioeconomic classes nor rural-urban distinctions provided any significant bonds that might heal these regional cleavages. The upper classes of Prussia, Bavaria, and the Southwest all exhibited a different value consensus, while in the Rhineland there was no consensus at all; its upper class was, in sociological terms, an undifferentiated mass. Even the national middle class exhibited no common value base. Only among the lower class did the *Gemeinschaft* model show some predominance in every region except the Rhineland. The only other important exception of this value dissensus, Baum notes, was the common commitment of the Prussian and the Rhineland upper and middle classes to a secularized "work ethic."

Baum also analyzes the one-dimensional nature of Germany's elites. Junker officers, for example, commanded enormous honor but—by the early 20th century—little wealth. Industrial managers had great wealth, but little honor or prestige. Academicians and civil servants enjoyed enormous cultural prestige but found themselves increasingly impecunious. Assuming the drive for status consistency to be a universal human trait, Baum relates how these various one-dimensional groups turned to politics as the sole possible means of compensating for "status destratification." The result, he suggests, was a quest for power of near-Hobbesian proportions. He concludes that Germans were in fact ethical strangers to one another and that the German nation was, in a sense, no nation at all. Created by the sword, united Germany never generated any core conception of what "the good life" was. Instead, ethical and moral judgments became highly subjective and privatized. German national elites developed an elaborately cultivated sense of value relativism. In the political realm, modernity came to mean a system of endlessly shifting interest coalitions, each searching for advantage and power. For this milieu, procedural legalism became a necessity. Yet it was a peculiar kind of legality, one wherein the law was something to be made and unmade as need dictated, unrestrained by any "sacred" fetters.

It was this unrestrained value pluralism, Baum insists, that permitted impe-

In the Mail

Croatia on Trial: The Case of the Croatian Historian Dr. F. Tudjman **translated by Dr. Zdenka Palić-Kušan, United Publishers; Amersham, England.** Croatian Dr. Tudjman spoke out and wrote about the subjugation of Croatia by the Yugoslavian government, acts for which he was jailed. Included here are texts relating to his second imprisonment.

Report of The United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, 1982; **Washington, DC.** The U.S. International Communication Agency (USICA) is the subject of this report. A key recommendation notes that the USICA "is vital to our national interest and the conduct of our foreign policy."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rial ambitions to blossom in Germany, "because a committed value pluralist negates the idea of citizenship as a moral community." A deep historical defect was thus made into a modern virtue. As social-science professor and SS leader Reinhard Höhn put it, "shared value commitments are destructive of a *Volksgemeinschaft.*" When the German armies set out to create a "new order" in the East, only commitment to the work ethic remained to guide the elites; this moral trait was twisted into the value-neutral, careerist, bureaucratic nightmare of The Holocaust Kingdom. Baum's work has weaknesses, particularly a tendency to let his generalizations outrun his evidence, but his focus on values and his overall thesis remain compelling. He notes that smaller nations with deep value cleavages, such as Switzerland or Holland, have managed to escape the disaster that befell modern Germany by the device of "consociational" democracy. This method of government demands elite solidarity, degrees of duplication and inefficiency, and the eschewing of great-power status. The United States, he emphasizes several times, has also managed to articulate a shared "mainstream" core of values giving it a coherent national identity.

Or has it? While it is indeed true that the United States was conceived in and exhibited through the middle of this century a fairly consistent value schema, evidence suggests that that consensus has almost completely unraveled over the last 20 years. Pollster Daniel Yankelovich's recent book *New Rules* chronicles this vast transformation in the shared meanings found among Americans, where the old values—sacrifice for children, hard work, religious belief, delayed gratification, lawfulness, civic duty, maintenance of an intact family, a nice neighborhood, and so on—are challenged by new ones focused on cultivation of the self. The result by the early 1980's, Yankelovich shows, is a standoff, wherein 20% of the population adhere firmly to the "old values" and 17% to the "new." The other 63% are scattered in between. These numbers reflect fresh and deep cleavages in America, fundamental differences on the nature of the good society, and deep disagreement over what it means to be an American. Norman Lear and Jerry Falwell, to choose the most obvious examples, stare at each other as ethical strangers, unable to communicate in moral terms. They and their camps are engaged in what Yankelovich calls "a national battle of moral norms . . . a cockpit of [cultural] conflict" which the pollster expects to continue for the remainder of this century. Reflecting this growing dissensus, "value neutrality" and an accentuated "pluralism" have indeed become the reigning orthodoxies of our professions, our bureaucracies and, increasingly, our public arena. If Baum's thesis is even partially correct, these trends portend a dangerous time ahead. Unconsciously echoing many German academicians of the late 19th century, Yankelovich celebrates America's new cultural and value pluralism, yet also yearns for a "synthesis" that might still heal the breach. This time, one is tempted to say, may it be so. □

Sleaze Experimental and Conventional

John Hawkes: *Virginie: Her Two Lives;* Harper & Row; New York.

Alice Adams: *To See You Again;* Alfred A. Knopf; New York.

by Stephen L. Tanner

These two works of fiction, one a novel and the other a collection of stories, exemplify two contrasting approaches in contemporary literature.

John Hawkes, a representative writer of experimental, nonmimetic fiction, attempts to create a world rather than to imitate the one immediately at hand. In creating the worlds of his novels, he acknowledges a strong feeling for dreams and an interest in "exploiting the richness and energy of the unconscious." Frederick Busch, in *Hawkes: A Guide to His Fiction,* characterizes him as a "voyager of the inner eye" as he describes Hawkes's distortion of our usual concept of the novel, his unsettling manipulation of narration, his fascination with the patterns and music of language, and his startling verbal equivalents of ordinarily inaccessible psychic history. According to Busch, "Hawkes's worlds are metaphoric ones with enough of our own world adduced—a wicked verisimilitude—to keep us suspended between what we have thought to be real and what Hawkes causes us to really care about in his monstrous worlds."

Hawkes shares with William Gass, Richard Gilman, Susan Sontag, and others the belief that fiction is how a writer's language behaves and should be described in terms of its language alone. This view is insisted upon in Richard Gilman's *The Confusion of Realms,* which attacks all artistic theory and practice that take literature to be "an employment of language for ends beyond itself." Invoking recent self-reflexive experimental fiction and the criticism of Susan Sontag, Gilman argues that literary works are self-sufficient, self-justifying universes, not second-order representations of some already-existing reality. Literature is properly an "increment," not a "complement," a new reality rather than a reflection of the old one. Art, says Gilman, need not communicate "experience of any kind except an esthetic one," and it has "no reason for being other than to test and exemplify new forms of consciousness, which, moreover, have had to be invented precisely because actuality is incapable of generating them." In a *Paris Review* article, Gilman applauds the "secularization of art, its chastening and the removal

Dr. Tanner is professor of English at Brigham Young University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from it of the 'values' that ought to be obtained elsewhere, i.e., the moral, social, and philosophical values which literature and art were once expected to communicate." Richard Poirier in *The Performing Self* makes the same point: "Literature has only one responsibility—to be compelled and compelling about its own inventions."

> "This book is thoroughly cerebral: it uses eroticism to arouse thought."
>
> —*Time*
>
> "Reading Hawkes, we are as we are when we approach orgasm if we are compelled by him."
>
> —*Village Voice*
>
> "Sexuality is emblematic of spiritual virtue."
>
> —*New York Times Book Review*

Hawkes once said, "It seems to me that fiction should achieve revenge for all the indignities of our childhood; it should be an act of rebellion against all the constraints of the conventional pedestrian mentality around us." In rebelling against such constraints, Hawkes has become a "writer's writer," an author whose works are structurally and stylistically challenging and opaque in meaning, resistant to objective analysis. He makes readers uncomfortable because they sense a remarkable imagination at work—striking imagery, startling situations, original expression, singular stylistic feats—but, perhaps tainted by that conventional pedestrian mentality, they don't know what to make of it all. Consequently, the writer's writer appears often on lists of important writers but infrequently on the shelves of readers.

In contrast to Hawkes's self-reflexive, nonmimetic fiction, the stories in Alice Adams's *To See You Again* are clearly representations of contemporary American life. Adams displays no inclination to create aesthetic worlds as increments to ordinary reality, and language for her is a vehicle of expression and not an end in itself. These stories, many of them set in or around San Francisco, usually treat contemporary American women muddling along in an attempt to achieve independence, self-fulfillment, and satisfactory relations with those less-than-admirable creatures, men. If Hawkes's fiction can be considered a rebellion against the constraints of conventional pedestrian mentality, Adams's can be seen as a tribute to conventional pedestrian liberal and feminist mentality.

Hawkes identifies his subject as "that wisp of shell-pink space shared equally, I am convinced, by the pornographic narrative (in color photographs) and the love lyric, from the troubadours, say, to the present. Thus parody, archaic tones, and an overall comic flavor were inevitable, as were sources and influences." He names his sources in French erotic literature and says the novel was conceived "in a reverie about de Sade."

Virginie, the eleven-year-old narrator, admits immediately that she is as impossible as the story she tells, which confirms Busch's characterization of Hawkes as "a geographer of the impossible." In alternating chapters, Virginie narrates her life in a French country estate in 1740 (the year of de Sade's birth, Hawkes informs us) and her life in a Paris apartment in 1945. Her 18th-century life is lived with a man referred to only as Seigneur, who selects five women at a time to instruct in the art of pleasing men. As they undertake their novitiate, the women receive symbolic names such as Finesse and Volupte. When they complete the course, which includes such peculiar activities as sexual dalliance with dogs, fellatio with pigs, wearing feathered underpants, having bees swarm their naked bodies, and seducing a priest in his confessional booth, they have a colorful butterfly tattooed on their bottoms, are called Noblesse, warned against marriage and receive their first assignments. Virginie serves as a kind of observer-assistant for all this. Her 20th-century life is lived with a Paris taxi-driver who presides over a household of five prostitutes. Her role as observer of sexual "charades" is essentially the same. Indeed, the circumstances of her two lives are intricately parallel, though aristocratic in one case and plebeian in the other.

Hawkes has said that his principal concerns as a writer are imagination, innocence, and sex. These concerns are clearly apparent in this novel; in fact, the three become blended or equated. The most imaginatively kinky sex, with all the sweat, dirt, blemishes, and animalism involved, is glorified as beautiful and innocent in this unabashedly pornographic novel. And one need feel no guilt in reading it, of course, because, after all, it is not an imitation of life; it is an aesthetic realm of words, literary parody, linguistic play, divorced from moral, social, and philosophical values that ought to be obtained elsewhere. We must not let Hawkes's obvious penchant for perverted titillation and his degradation of marriage and religion distract us from his artistry in images, his sophisticated structuring, his experimental aesthetic vision.

Unlike Hawkes, Alice Adams is no geographer of the impossible. The situations in her stories are not only possible but (alas!) typical, at least among the people of whom she writes. Her subject is "affairs." Adultery apparently is not an item in her vocabulary, nor is any similar synonym; she simply relies on adjectives to discriminate among types of affairs: overwhelming, intemperate, searing, flagrant, passionate, ill-advised, Latin (involving a Mexican), legendary, passingly satisfactory, lonely, serious, miserable, punishing, and silly—just to note a few. These affairs occur in stories that share many characteristics. The women are unmarried and competent in some

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kind of career. Their relationships with men are unsatisfactory, primarily because men are essentially cruel or really can't tell women apart and consider them mere adjuncts to themselves and keepers of their houses. Their attraction to men is frankly acknowledged as lust. Children and family life, aside from husband-wife conflicts, are left out of consideration. Southerners are bigoted subscribers to the "Protestant-Puritan myths." The moral tone, such as it is, is one of stock liberal permissiveness. The conflict in the story is resolved (if "conflict" and "resolved" are not overstating it) by the woman deciding not to marry or not to continue an affair but instead turning to self-reliant independence.

"The Break-In" is a representative example. Cynthia, who works as a reader for a publisher, "has never married, just had lots of affairs." After "a rather silly affair with her employer, an erratic and on the whole irresponsible young man," she is now planning to marry Roger, who has been married and divorced three times. Roger has a mountain house near Lake Tahoe, where they have spent several weekends. When word comes that the house has been vandalized, they drive from San Francisco to survey the damage. The sheriff, "red-faced, with a beer swollen stomach," thinks it was hippies that broke in; "he has never forgotten nor forgiven hippies." (Note the complexity of characterization Adams displays.) When he leaves, the couple look at each other and sigh at such intolerant stupidity. Later, it occurs to Roger that the break-in could have been committed by a group of Mexicans he had evicted from his property when they were having a noisy picnic. This suggestion, which she takes as a racial slur, upsets Cynthia and lowers Roger in her estimation. She puts it together with her growing feeling that he is too concerned with the house and decides she can't marry him. He really doesn't know who she is, she thinks; women are all alike to him. As she prepares to walk out on him and take a train back to San Francisco, she discovers a notebook from St. Christopher's School, the "expensive, ultraconservative school" Roger had attended 20 years ago. But this notebook is new, and she infers that it was "rich kids" from that school who had done the damage. With a sack of manuscripts in her hand, she heads "toward the train and a beautiful trip, going home." One need not be particularly alert in order to get the messages.

Though these books are products of contrasting theories of fiction, their moral implications are not entirely dissimilar, and both call into question the notion of universally agreed upon meanings of such fundamental concepts as love, normality, and morality. One of Adams's characters defines love as "the most overwhelming, most intense and inexhaustible sensuality." Another defines normality as three marriages, three children, and three abortions. "I haven't counted lovers," she says, but "it comes to a normal life, for a woman of my age." Obviously there is irony here, but as a matter of fact, these are accurate definitions of love and normality as they are manifest in *To See You Again*. In *Virginie* love and normality are even more problematic, but the dust jacket of *Virginie* lauds Hawkes's "moral imagination." Unable to make any sense of that, one can conclude only that the writers of dust-jacket copy have a rather perverse concept of "moral." Readers of these books would be well advised to ponder exactly what meanings lie behind familiar concepts easily taken for granted. □

Lessons Unlearned

Harry G. Summers, Jr.: *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War;* Presidio Press; Ignacio, CA.

by William R. Hawkins

On Strategy is not a history of the Vietnam War, nor is it a description of battles or even a dissertation on tactics. It is an attempt to fit the policies pursued during Vietnam into a strategic framework at the highest level in order to learn where the errors were made. In a field where the vast bulk of the writing—on all sides—has been polemical rather than analytical, Summers's well-researched book is welcome.

The principal criticism which Summers makes is that the U.S. concentrated on the wrong enemy. "Instead of focusing our attention on the external enemy, North Vietnam—the source of the war—we turned our attention to the symptom—the guerrilla war in the South—and limited our attacks on the North to air and sea actions only." As an infantry officer, Summers realizes that wars are ultimately won or lost on the ground, so he dismisses the bombing campaign over the North and, while he favored a more aggressive campaign against sanctuaries and supply routes in Cambodia and Laos, he goes well beyond these familiar themes. His real target is the doctrine of counterinsurgency, which he blames on the civilian defense intellectuals who overrode the experience of the active military. Counterinsurgency had the same paralyzing effect on Army thinking as the massive-retaliation doctrine in the 1950's did. Both doctrines advance the belief that military history has no lessons to be applied to current events—modern conditions are new and unique. Acceptance of this reduced the perceived value of military advice and opened the way for the "best and the brightest" of civilian advisers. When Army Chief of Staff George H. Decker disputed this point with John F. Kennedy, he was replaced in his position by the more pragmatic Earle Wheeler. Vietnam-era Presidents

---

Mr. Hawkins is assistant professor of economics at Radford University in Virginia.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

paid scant attention to military commanders except on technical matters, and strategic input from the Army was minimal.

Counterinsurgency was appealing to liberal leaders because it contained a large element of reformist sentiment. Although Colonel Summers does not pursue this issue, it is relevant to his thesis. When Hubert Humphrey proclaimed his desire to build a "TVA on the Mecong Delta" and so win the hearts and minds of the peasants, it became apparent that something other than conventional strategy was at work. Economists specializing in Third World development often reveal tendencies to see these countries as blank pages on which any design, but usually one with a liberal-socialist bent, can be drawn. Counterinsurgency meant greater civilian input to policy, more sociological studies, and the relegating of the military to a mere armed-escort role. The same mind-set can be seen now in El Salvador, where land reform is considered by some to be more important than the survival of the country itself. The counterinsurgency campaign executed in Vietnam backfired in several ways. It restricted American troops to guard duty inside South Vietnam where they could only react to North Vietnamese operations. And when they did react, the destruction was in the territory of our ally, rather than our enemy's. It assured a strategy of attrition which undermined American homefront morale. It blurred the issue of U.S. involvement so much that defending an ally from invasion came to be seen by some as helping to suppress a "popular" uprising. It sapped the legitimacy of the Saigon government by putting American troops into Vietnamese domestic programs, which also slowed the South's development.

Summers would have preferred that we learn from the Korean War. In that conflict, American troops dealt almost exclusively with the external threat from China and North Korea. Though there were guerrillas in South Korea, the Seoul regime was able to cope with them behind a shield of U.S. troops whose operations against the North isolated the South. Vietnam was another basically conventional war, though very fluid. The Vietcong alone could not have toppled the Saigon regime, and, after Tet-'68, it steadily declined. There never was a popular uprising: "It was four North Vietnamese corps, not 'dialectical materialism' which ultimately conquered South Vietnam." Korea *should have* taught us, according to Summers, that U.S. forces were capable of defending an ally even against Chinese intervention. However, in Vietnam, the fear of Chinese intervention prevented adoption of a strategy to defeat Hanoi and fight, in truth as well as name, the Second Indochina War across Laos and Cambodia as well as Vietnam. We learned the wrong lessons from Korea about fighting the Chinese, and an

equally false notion from Vietnam about our ability to win a limited war.

The U.S. did not lose on the battlefield. "One of the most frustrating aspects of the Vietnam War from the Army's point of view is that we succeeded in everything we set out to do," states Summers. "Yet, in the end, it was North Vietnam, not the United States, that emerged victorious. How could we have succeeded so well, yet failed so miserably?" The temptation to blame the politicians in Washington or the press corps is strong, even though Summers states early on: "A stab-in-the-back syndrome never developed after Vietnam." However, the mass of evidence leads one to this conclusion. Not only was there civilian dominance in strategy and firm civilian control of the military (it is revealing that despite harsher restrictions in Vietnam than Korea on military operations, Vietnam did not produce a MacArthur or any noticeable resignation in protest by a high-ranking commander), but there was also lack of firm resolve among the civilians for the course of action they adopted. Most telling is a quote from Doris Kearns's *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* in which LBJ says: "History provided too many cases where the sound of the bugle put an end to the hopes and dreams of the best reformers. . . . Once the war began, then all those conservatives in Congress would use it against the Great Society." In the end, of course, it was the left, not the right, which won the battle of budget priorities between defense and welfare. It is not hard to conclude that those who initiated U.S. intervention did not have their hearts in it and so would find any excuse not to press forward. Here Summers engages in some wishful thinking. He would like to have gone into Vietnam with solid public backing—including a formal declaration of war against North Vietnam. Such a declaration would have focused our efforts against the real enemy while making it difficult for politicians to put the war on the back burner. An aroused public would have demanded a speedy victory. Summers hastens to add that victory would not have meant "unconditional surrender," as in World War II, but merely the defeat of communist aggression, as in Korea.

But an administration fearful of confrontation with the U.S.S.R. and China and which had domestic policy as its first

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

concern was unlikely to push for a declaration of war. One can sympathize with Summers's desire that the Army not be committed until the country was committed, but the reality of world politics makes this an ideal that will seldom be realized. America is still the only world power capable of blocking communist expansion. To do that, the U.S. will have to be able to fight limited "dirty" wars like those in Vietnam and Korea as well as to engage in lesser forms of military action.

Perhaps the late T. Harry Williams was correct when he concluded from his study of *The History of American Wars* that Americans were inherently nonmilitary and incapable of developing a national strategy. On the other hand, perhaps books like *On Strategy* and others in the expanding revisionist school of Vietnam, aided by a backlash as pondered by Kevin Phillips in *Post-Conservative America,* can alter that disposition. History is full of examples both ways. Some nations learn from their mistakes and reform to meet new challenges. Others simply decline in a succession of mistakes and lessons never learned, merely repeated. □

Pushcart Perversions & Blasphemy as Toy

Scott Sommer: *Last Resort;* Random House; New York.

Greg Barron: *Groundrush;* Random House; New York.

by Bryce Christensen

Unlike the essayist, the novelist is not primarily concerned with the explicit declaration of attitudes or beliefs. His is rather the task of creating believable characters and narrating their lives. Nevertheless, in fashioning his narrative the novelist must be guided by some set of opinions or doctrines. His fiction consequently becomes not a polemic for but a celebration of his guiding values. When these values derive from an honest heart and a probing mind, the art they inspire invariably reveals truths concerning the human condition—while usually violating many of the prevailing fashionable illusions. The result is the work of a Dostoevski or a Bellow. When, on the other hand, the writer's values derive simply from a self-serving desire for acclaim and wealth, his art (to use the term loosely) falsifies man's condition while slavishly endorsing modish mendacities. The result is the work of a Scott Sommer or a Greg Barron.

If *Last Resort* is any indication, Sommer has been so busy mastering the knack of turning stylish perversity to profit that he has not bothered to learn how to write. Though occasionally brightened by a hint of talent or wit, his book is mostly a tiresome rehearsal of the banal preoccupations of modern decadence. His hero, Tramp Bottoms, is a cynical but sensitive rock lyricist struggling to make meaning out of a chaotic world of sex, mind-blowing drugs, sex, rapacious capitalism, sex, callous parents, sex, oppressive authorities, sex, repressive traditions, and more sex. It's one big turned-on cliché, carelessly written in a style so laid-back that it threatens to slide off the page.

Although Tramp is intended to be a kind of sentient poet-philosopher keenly aware of the irrelevance of bourgeois tradition, yet also cognizant of the inadequacies of the modern counterculture, he is really just a surrogate for Sommer the huckster, eager to gratify the most corrupt of contemporary prejudices for the price indicated on the dust jacket. True, Sommer does cautiously satirize the modern rock culture of drugs and kinky sex, but this is just voguishly playful lament—nothing harsh enough to offend his with-it audience. His more strident attacks are reserved for true arch-villains—reactionary religionists, malign Republicans, nuclear-power plants, neurotic policemen. But even these jabs are only trifling. The real business of the book, that for which Sommer evidently expects to collect his royalty checks, is the mindless celebration of sex and the sentimental affirmation of behavioral nihilism. As Sommer well knows, readers and reviewers will eagerly ante up for such fare.

Accordingly, Sommer lays out the genital urges of his characters for inspection by his approving customers. A provident purveyor, he provides something for almost everyone in his pages. For the homosexuals and bisexuals, there's the bizarre sex indulged in by Tramp's manager and his wife with hip people other than each other. For the straights, there's a generous helping of extramarital fun—woman usually on top—between Tramp and his live-in girl friend Leah and between Tramp's crippled sister and her understanding friend. And for those into animal voyeurism, step right this way and watch Tramp's dog make it with a French poodle. As outdated ware, conjugal relationships naturally appear only in the querulous complaints of Tramp's parents about their unsatisfying sex lives. (Tramp avoids their awful fate by deciding not to marry Leah because he loves her too much.) To help his audience feel good about their prurience, Sommer even throws in a little philosophizing for a nominal charge. People, he astutely observes, are at their "best, feel most centered and at home on earth, in those semiconscious, weightless aftermaths of carnal exhaustion." For those of an eschatological bent, Tramp testifies that "if heaven is a place, it is surely a woman's body," and to those willing to put something in the plate for a more extended sermon, he offers this bit of pseudopious rationalization:

> My generation was raised on milk tainted with radioactive strontium 90

Mr. Christensen is an editorial intern at Chronicles.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> from aboveground nuclear testing. Also toxic waste polluted our processed baby food. We all fear bone cancer, an abbreviated life. Chemotherapy is always on the horizon. Sex, on the other hand, is intelligible. It can be performed in the safety of one's own bed. See what I mean?

Even though there's no meaning to be seen, Sommer expects us nevertheless to part with our coin, for he knows that profane skepticism is the most profitable storefront religion in town. So, after a quick advertising blitz against the Christian competition (Jesus is mockingly dismissed as a pathetic sad sack with "no sense of humor"), he sets about packaging his own brand of presweetened nihilistic religiosity. In one-ounce boxes Tramp offers such tasties as: "I had a dog and a universe of supreme indifference to keep me company" and "Name someone who has graduated from their tricycle not demented with grief." In the economy 18-ounce size he offers whole rock songs of comparable quality and flavor. In a typical stanza (accompanied by a cacophonous Snap, Crackle, Pop), Tramp serves up this instant nourishment:

> Nothing real ever mattered
> All our illusions promptly shattered
> In one ear, out the other
> Far too hopeless to recover.

It may not be quite the whole-grain Bread of Life Dad and Mom were raised on, but it works like the Breakfast of Champions for Tramp: in the end, Tramp sells three of his rock songs for megabucks, Leah unexpectedly reverses her decision to leave him, and he inexplicably congratulates himself on "backing into adulthood." Save your boxtops and you too can have the latest literary toy, *nihil ex machina.*

The protagonist and chief salesman in Barron's *Groundrush* is Beowulf, a troubled and cynical high-school football player with a penchant for tearing the arms off of ball carriers rather than monsters. Doubtless because it sells so well, illicit sex is again on the block (though this time the more extraordinary forms are not in stock), as are vicarious drug highs, pathological violence, profanity, and scatological crudity. Other than the articles *the* and *a,* the expletives for excrement and sexual intercourse are probably the most oft-repeated words in the book. Still, Barron is a more disciplined and honest merchant than Sommer. His portrayal of Beowulf's jumbled life shows with depressing clarity just how ugly and void existence can be when human appetites are governed by no higher principles than those which obtain on the gridiron. Indeed, through the eyes of his Nietzsche in shoulder pads, Barron exposes America's fanatical obsession with football as a destructive form of will-worship. With black-comic appropriateness, he even depicts a pregame football mass, complete with a priest holding a plastic football above the altar as a new symbol of salvation.

Unfortunately, having rendered football an unworthy object for supreme faith, Barron has only other trivial modern icons to offer as replacements. The dimensions of the life he depicts off the playing field are therefore terribly contracted: fornicating now and then, toying with drugs, running for long distances alone, growing one's hair and playing guitar in bars, contemplating suicide and murder. It certainly does not add up to much. The explanation is that Barron's primary aim is not simply to discredit illusory faith in a violent game, but to discredit faith in general—and to be well paid for doing it. For even as he calls into question the worship of an idle entertainment, he himself assumes the lucrative vestments of the popular anti-priest who preaches that life itself is an empty game. To the itching ears of auditors with more money than faith, he delivers this dejectionist homily:

> A body awakens fully to life only in a dream. When the dream dissolves there is nothing; just a night of tossing and turning, hatching thoughts to fling helplessly against eternity.

A sharp businessman-cleric, Barron recognizes that he can continue to fleece his flock only so long as they do not wander into the care of some other Shepherd, so in the second chapter he erects a cautionary water-tower billboard proclaiming that "Jesus Saves Roaches" and confirms its sentiments in Beowulf's subsequent philosophizing about the impossibility of Christ's being savior for anyone. Barron's intent is evidently to reduce the victory Jesus achieved on a hill with three uprights to the same irrelevant status as the victories won by high-school boys on fields with two of different shape.

Consequently, when the game on which the book focuses ends in a disappointing tie, it is meant to stand as metaphor for Beowulf's inability to resolve his problems with self, family, and friends. But also, like the priest's plastic football, it is intended to be a religious sign representing the universe, a sign under which no one conquers. No one, that is, but a smart author cashing in on chic despair. □

In the Mail

***Government in American Society,* Revised Edition by Anthony T. Bouscaren; University Press of America; Lanham, MD.** This textbook is described as "a simple, straightforward account of the main principles and procedures of American government." Which it is.

***The National Interests of the United States in Foreign Policy* edited by Prosser Gifford; University Press of America with the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; Lanham, MD.** This text comprises seven discussions at the Wilson Center that were held in late 1980 and early 1981, covering various options in U.S. foreign policy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We the People: Forest, Trees, or Roadside Zoo

Peter Davis: *Hometown: A Contemporary Chronicle;* Simon & Schuster; New York.

John Shelton Reed: *One South: An Ethnic Approach to Regional Culture;* Louisiana State University Press; Baton Rouge.

by Marion Montgomery

Peter Davis's *Hometown* is a stranger's imposition of ideas about "America" upon a local community of some 63,000 unsuspecting souls; from that community he selects some 12 specimen citizens to stand for the whole—not merely the town, but the whole country. A writer/producer for CBS, Mr. Davis disguises his abstractionism with a technique perhaps learned from fiction writing or journalism courses or his experience with TV docudramas. He presents his material as if it were empirical observation untainted by subjective distortions, but he gives it the immediacy of narrative technique—a deadly combination of pretense and method.

Mr. Davis sets out to "map the passions of one American town," which sounds like hype for a new movie or soap opera. Since it is *passion* he is after, he takes a curious approach—he consults the Census Bureau: "Tell me where I can go to combine categories of social research with techniques of storytelling. Where I can observe activities the way an anthropologist might, as Robert and Helen Lynd did in *Middletown,* and then tell about them as Sherwood Anderson did in *Winesburg, Ohio."* Such a task would require of the researcher the formal training of the sociologist and the talent of a fiction writer before he could hope to divine any passions. But abstractionism seems too far advanced in Davis. He is thus determined to locate a roadside zoo that houses fauna he may feature as representative of a hemisphere. Davis's requirements, presented to a kindly wizard at the Census Bureau, meet a kindly response: Hamilton, Ohio, is fingered. Why? As the Census Bureau necromancer tells Davis, his town "should have a population between fifty and one hundred thousand since below fifty the complete array of situations and institutions is lacking, and above one hundred the community becomes too complex. . . . The town should be northern enough to be industrial, southern enough to have a gentle rural aspect, western enough to have once been on the frontier, eastern enough to have a past." Davis—like Goldilocks with the bears' chairs, porridge, and beds—finds Hamilton, Ohio, "just right." What the bears had to say about the intrusion is another matter; an appendix (unedited) of responses by the subjects of this "study" would be interesting.

Mr. Davis's presumption is that man is a creature environmentally determined, with some slight modification by heredity—especially if he is of Appalachian origin. The wizard's geonecromancy, through which the ideal place is pinpointed on the map, is further demonstration of the implicit determinist presumptions. As Davis isolates individual specimens from the Census Bureau's "culture," one feels as if he is watching a species of TV headache commercials. We watch through a one-way mirror, which is Davis. What we see is neither the controlled observation of the anthropologist nor the enlargement of life that is the province of the fiction writer. We have, in other words, a brief visit to a Hamilton zoo. How representative of 60,000 souls are the lives of the two outlaws who occupy so large a portion of the book? And do the ladies of Hamilton speak so openly about their most private family and community matters to drifting Easterners with pad and pencil in hand? And above all, since the authenticity of this study is in question and the words really spoken by the selected specimens are supposed to demonstrate objective reality, why do the citizens of Hamilton tend to speak with Harvard refinements and diction? At a wedding reception a bitter old working-class grandmother and various relatives on both sides bring up old quarrels with such candid openness that one becomes suspicious. Then there is a striking paper-mill worker who is nearly as articulate as Cicero. Good Lord, deliver us from the "science" that was practiced on the good folk of Hamilton, Ohio.

> "The harm that can be done by rigid morality conjoined with political power—a holy alliance that has now surfaced in our national politics—is indelibly set down in Peter Davis's book."
>
> —**Richard Lingeman**
> *Psychology Today*

When we turn to John Shelton Reed's *One South,* we come to quite another interest, one justifying our attention. Instead of an outsider imposing a formula in the interest of a project, we have in Mr. Reed's work a native's attempt to define his home country, to understand it for himself and his readers, and to explain it to his professional peers. What does it mean to be a Southerner? Mr. Reed of Tennessee, a professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina, seems less than comfortable in his efforts: there is in the book a dis-ease which I applaud. Mr. Reed understands sociology to require that he stand aside from—indeed outside of—his home country if what he has to say is to be credited by his professional colleagues. The sociologist is expected to rise above

Professor Montgomery is the author of Why Flannery O'Connor Stayed Home.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the actual subject in the interest of categorizing. It is the chief virtue of his book that Mr. Reed is not able to levitate to such a plane, which gives virtue to some of his recognitions rather than detracting from them. That he is aware of division in his own mind is reflected by the order of his essays. In the first he is more professionally concerned; those in the final section take the opportunity to be "explicitly exhortative." Mr. Reed apologizes for the latter—which are more interesting and, I think, more sound—essays, presumably to his professional peers: "From time to time, I get the opportunity to write about what I like and dislike about the South, and it is hard to resist."

That apology points to a more fundamental division in the book than its sectional structure, a division both encouraging and, at times, distressing. If our author feels uncomfortable with the professional requirements he is compelled to honor as sociologist, there must be something visceral in his spirit telling him those requirements are not adequate to the complexity of his subject. He pays homage to Howard Odum, his professional precursor, but with something like embarrassment, a bit like a grandson who loves his grandfather but is uncomfortable when the old man is brought into company with his own contemporaries. We all, whether we admit it or even know it, choose fathers and grandfathers from a community of companionable spirits. Mr. Reed consciously chooses W.J. Cash as we read him in *The Mind of the South* (1941), over Odum in *Southern Regions of the United States* (1936), a regrettable choice. For the Cash of *Mind of the South* is not as likely to reveal to Mr. Reed the validity of his instincts about the South, those intincts for which he apologizes.

Besides those fathers whom we deliberately choose, there are others who must be reckoned with if we are true to our intellectual and spiritual callings, as Mr. Reed clearly intends to be. As professional intellectuals, we are required to seek them out, and it is here that my disquiet with *One South* grows. I do not believe Mr. Reed has fully explored the minds of Odum and Cash. He recognizes that a certain Hegelian spirit haunts sociology, but in choosing Cash over Odum he overlooks the decidedly Hegelian slant in Cash. Even more disturbing is Mr. Reed's failure to discover allies who articulate the Hegelian problem. One thinks at once of Donald Davidson, who might well supply precisely the insight needed. In his defense of regionalism against deterministic deconstructions of reality, *The Attack on Leviathan* (1938), Davidson provides a sympathetic but critical examination of "Howard Odum and the Sociological Proteus." It is as sound in its fundamental concerns for "an ethnic approach to culture" as when it was first written to examine Odum's *Southern Regions;* it is particularly helpful in setting Odum's virtues apart from the more deterministic sociologists who dominate the new "science." Another of Davidson's essays cries out by its title alone for the sociologist as regionalist to confront it: "Still Rebels, Still Yankees." That essay is also the title of a later collection of Davidson's pieces, issued in 1957 by Mr. Reed's own publishers. This second gathering includes a devastating critique of Cash's *The Mind of the South,* "Mr. Cash and the Proto-Dorian South." I read Mr. Reed's concluding essay, "The Same Old Stand," as it first appeared in a symposium honoring the publication of *I'll Take My Stand.* In tribute to those "12 Southerners" (one of whom is Davidson) Mr. Reed—surprisingly—takes a position as a disciple of Cash; as I reread the piece, I wonder how he could be unaware of Davidson's critique, why he must not either confirm, repudiate, or modify his own reading of Cash, given his enthusiasm for the Agrarian cause.

I wonder about other omissions as well, particularly of some pieces by the authors of *I'll Take My Stand:* Davidson's *Attack on Leviathan* . . . Frank Lawrence Owsley's *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America* (1931) . . . Andrew Lytle's *A Wake for the Living* (1975) . . . Richard Weaver's *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought* . . . Allen Tate's *Essays of Four Decades* . . . One especially regrets that Tate's own exhortative essay "The New Provincialism" (1945) is not considered since it has incisive things to say about distinctions between the terms *regionalism* and *provincialism* that would enrich and clarify and deepen Mr. Reed's terms *regionalism* and *localism.* Several of these works would throw light on a central puzzle Mr. Reed says he cannot quite disentangle, namely: why the South itself has not been hospitable to sociology. He sees it a failure of the South, but deep down I suspect he feels it is a failure of sociology.

Why does the South prove inhospitable to sociology? "I don't think the sociological way of thinking comes as easily to well-articulated Southerners as to other Americans," Mr. Reed says. For sociological thinking is "a *generalized* discipline [his italics]. It requires, at least initially, that one ignore the differences between individuals and between groups, and concentrate on what they have in common. At its best, it is supposed to apply abstract theoretical categories to disparate phenomena and to see the underlying similarities among apparently quite different empirical cases. . . . Sociology intends to talk about the forest; detailed and loving attention to individual trees is not our business." If this is the sum of sociology's intellectual position, it is not difficult to see why it is not good enough. For if "this isn't a very Southern way to go about things," neither is it an intellectually sound way to go about things in *any* place or time. But the distinction Mr. Reed intends to make is not really one between seeing the forest on the one hand and the individual tree on the other: it is between seeing the forest as so many board feet and the individual tree as so many 2 x 4's as opposed to seeing elm or pine or poplar in a landscape breathing, suspiring with life deeper than the lumberman's measurements. It is not necessarily cause for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

celebration, then, that sociology departments are now "thoroughly entrenched" in the South's major colleges and universities. What is rather more certain is that in those regional institutions there are fewer of the Howard Odum branch than there are thoroughgoing deterministes. The distinction is one Davidson makes between Odum and others when he sees Rupert Vance, Odum's colleague and another of Mr. Reed's mentors, as in the deterministic camp. Mr. Reed recognizes a problem when, in lamenting the failure of regional sociology as a discipline within the larger body, he calls it "an unstable and eclectic compound of Neo-Hegelianism and conservative Social Darwinism." Unsound, he says, but "perhaps worse, old-fashioned." But such a mixture of philosophical grounds does not become sounder by being more sophisticated, which is to say, more obscure in its philosophical position. Despite the new technologies of abstractionism, particularly statistical refinements, sociology has not changed in essence. It is still residually Hegelian.

No wonder that Columbia University proved more hospitable than Vanderbilt University to the advent of departments and schools of sociology. What the "Southerner" (and in my own essay in *Why the South Will Survive* I examine Solzhenitsyn as "Southerner") recognizes in the sociologist's position as defined by Mr. Reed is that the "empirical cases" with which he begins are already an abstraction such as that Davis attempts to take advantage of in his popularization. Theoretical categories are manufactured by the sociological mind out of matter not fully digested and by the justifications of Hegelian assumptions about man in the world. A "Southerner" recognizes them viscerally. The "underlying similarities," in consequence, are similarities of a gnostic manufacture; abstractions are derived from abstractions and then reimposed upon the reality they are supposed to explain. *Hometown* is one example of such an approach to the reality.

We concluded our account of Davis's book with a prayer for our own deliverance. Here, let us rather pray for our good neighbor's delivery—John Shelton Reed's—from entrapment in gnostic categories and for his return to the freedom of reality as he knows it deep down. One has the feeling, particularly in the essays of the final section, of a spirit on the verge of discovering it has answered a wrong professional calling or has wrongly answered a valid calling. Mr. Reed is a lover of trees who has come too near a slavery to board feet. But the sudden intrusions of very concrete worlds into his essays, actions, and sayings are not filtered into a single voice, and they come with a sudden sense of excitement in the essayist. He takes on the presence of witness rather than of surveyor. Mr. Reed's observations about the concreteness of country music are illustrated persuasively. How close those songs often are to where we live, to the realities of *persons* and *places* rather than to *individuals* in *categories*. From a cultivation of such insights, Mr. Reed, I think, will tell us many helpful things about what is good or bad in the South. □

Penny-Ante Controversies

Marge Piercy: *Braided Lives;* Summit Books; New York.

Margaret Atwood: *Bodily Harm;* Simon & Schuster; New York.

George Stade: *Confessions of a Lady-killer;* Alpha Omega; Medford, OR.

by Edward J. Walsh

The expiration of the deadline for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment was a tremendous blow to radical feminism. A second ERA has been introduced in Congress, but it is seen for the transparent political sop that it is, and has received almost no attention, even from pro-ERA media outlets. Why did the ERA lose? Its supporters claim that it was murdered by male state legislators who want to keep women enslaved in the kitchen. State legislators usually vote in the direction of the most intense political pressure. In the case of the ERA, opposition came from women in Illinois, Florida, North Carolina and everywhere else. Phyllis Schlafly's organization, Eagle Forum, is well known, and it counted as allies millions of women who saw the ERA for what it was: the symbol of an alien culture. Unfortunately, moderate women who genuinely want only to improve the conditions of poorer working women have been betrayed by the feminist radicals. The radicals themselves were used as a kind of politically chic camouflage by another cultural group (or perhaps subgroup): women who write smutty books.

The left-wing journal *The Progressive* declares that Marge Piercy's *Braided Lives* is the "familiar story of bohemianism up against social convention made new." But there's nothing new about this book, except maybe that it shows literary feminism to be a scam, a way for radical women with literary aspirations to get into print in the time-tested method of pulp novelists: write about sex. Piercy falls into line. However, she also displays an unintended clownishness by pretending to a serious defense of women's "right" to abortion in a book in which the female characters copulate like rabbits.

Braided Lives is the story of one Jill Stuart's odyssey from an innocent girlhood in a conservative Detroit Jewish household in the 50's to political awareness in the 60's. Her father is a traditionalist drudge whose back-breaking blue-collar job puts Jill in touch with

Mr. Walsh is a frequent contributor to Chronicles.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hard-working people and their way of life, which she spends the rest of her time trying to escape. Her mother, a caricature of Cinderella's stepmother, tricks Jill into admitting she has had intercourse with her college boyfriend, and the stage is set. While Jill strives earnestly to become a poet, men grab at her clothes. Seldom does she resist for long. However, a catharsis occurs early on—Jill becomes pregnant and her mother helps her induce a miscarriage with a series of savage, folk-medicine "cures," which Jill pledges inwardly never to see forced on women. That is the key to a pathetic melodrama in which every girl in the book hops into bed with every man who wanders past—a poky Victorianism *à rebours,* in which continence means sin and repression. Eventually, her cousin miscalculates and finds herself in a family way. She has had a Catholic upbringing, which gives Piercy the opportunity to blast *that* particular "repression." And on the book goes, from beds to abortion mills and back again.

"[In *Braided Lives*] there is a compelling sense of fate."

—*Chicago Tribune*

The novel is written as a narrative told by Jill, 42-year-old radical poetess, who confides: "Passion out of accidental circumstances transcended is what they're buying." That is what Piercy, apparently, is trying to sell. The life of her heroine takes place mostly in the bohemian subculture at a university in Michigan, with occasional forays to her parents' home and the wealthy conservative enclave of one of her lover's parents. Her "passion" is no more than a fervent desire to put as much distance as possible between herself and conventional or traditional standards of any kind. That is part of the reason why this book is so hard to accept as anything but a pulp. Jill exists in a sort of future time capsule—the radical late 60's set back in the quieter, conservative 50's. Certainly, universities have always had political and sexual rebels. In the 50's and earlier they were called beatniks, and they attracted a substantial following that alienated parents and set the stage for the student idealism that helped fuel the civil-rights movement and the early stages of the antiwar movement. But the main reason for the beatniks' rather genial notoriety was that they were so different; they were conspicuous because they couldn't avoid bumping into those who led conventional lives, who were still the vast majority. In *Braided Lives* there is no inkling of that conventionality except for Jill's parents, who are but brutalized cardboard characters. There is no sense of what that time was like. Everyone in this book is tuned into the radical politics, casual sex, or humorless literature—usually all three—that were the hallmarks of campus life a decade later. But *this* story simply isn't real—it wasn't like this. Of course, it really doesn't matter how a polemicist arranges her allegory, except that one can't argue seriously for abortion rights in a book in which women equate sexual functions with primary hygiene. When the layers of feminist political hype are peeled away, that is what is left of *Braided Lives.*

Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm* is at least a book in which something actually happens. It is *feminist* in a purer and more literal sense: it deals with the emotional and psychological consequences of mastectomy. Rennie, a Canadian "lifestyles" writer, loses her beau after her surgery. She flees to a Caribbean island and endeavors to "find herself." The book turns into a series of flashbacks *(Braided Lives* flashes *forward)* in which Rennie converses with the owner of a punk-style clothing store and with her doctor, with whom she fantasizes an extramarital affair. Inevitably, she is embroiled in a penny-ante tropical revolution/election, is falsely implicated in a plot to aid the challenger, and spends a few days in jail. She is released, finally, to return to Toronto, somehow spiritually cleansed: "She will never be rescued. She has already been rescued. She is not exempt. Instead she is lucky, suddenly, finally, she's overflowing with luck, it's this luck holding her up." The exaggerated passivity of these lines sums up Rennie. Piercy's Jill is almost mannish in her pursuit of the opposite sex; Atwood's Rennie is a model of forced helplessness. She is pushed around roughly by both men and women, and her escape at the novel's close suggests little but a happy outcome to another close call. What she has learned, what she will do differently in the future is as murky as the book's opening. Atwood is hinting at something larger than women's victimization, though. Rennie is like a runtish Meursault of Camus's *The Stranger*—detached, indifferent, caught in a primitive culture, yet essentially unmoved by it or anything else. The setting and story line are full of stereotypically invoked Third World politics.

"The only way to describe my response to this one [*Bodily Harm*] is to say that it knocked me out."

—*New York Times*

There is nothing indifferent about George Stade's *Confessions of a Ladykiller,* a tongue-in-cheek grotesquery about the excesses of radical feminists. Victor Grant, the narrator, begins by informing the reader: "I am the hero or the villain of the narrative to follow, depending on whether you are a feminist or a human being."

Grant and his wife Samantha are happily married. Their closest friends, however, are a couple as improbable as the principal story line of this book: Bill Austin, a Caspar Milquetoast English professor, and Jude Karnofsky, a battle-ax feminist, "*The* Jude Karnofsky, your favorite science-fiction writer disguised as anthropologist, prize-winning author-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE MONUMENTAL LITERATURE OF DWARFS . . . CONTINUES.

THE ROCKFORD PAPERS' new series, "The Monumental Literature of Dwarfs," continues its critical look at contemporary American literature with essays on the following celebrated authors:

THE REJECTIONIST SCHOOL. Is John Barth the dean of a new school of novel-writing that will push the tradition forward, and is Robert Coover one of the brightest pupils — or are both, and others, merely facile creators of surfaces? Bryce Christensen looks below the facades of these writers.

NORMAN MAILER. Is he still the great white hope of American literature or an artifact of ideological follies? Edward J. Walsh examines the author of *The Naked and the Dead.*

JOSEPH HELLER. Is he the leading satirist of the modern bureaucratic mind, or is he merely the chronicler of banalities? Joseph Schwartz examines the author of *Catch 22* and less-memorable works.

WILLIAM GASS. Some think him the most philosophical of American writers today, while others see his search for philological essences on a par with seeking the center of an onion. Lee Congdon looks at the author of *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country.*

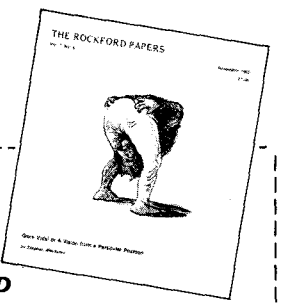
". . . some of the best conservative writing of recent times."

Our writing on such issues as the Cold War, liberalism, education, the media, the New Right and the Moral Majority has brought favorable mention in publications as diverse as the *Washington Post, New Oxford Review* and the *Congressional Record.*

Peregrine Worsthorne, associate editor of London's *Sunday Telegraph,* says: "I always benefit from reading *The Rockford Papers* which seems to me to include some of the best conservative writing of recent times."

It's the kind of writing that earned us the Freedoms Foundation's 1981 George Washington Honor Medal.

Why not join our growing list of readers? Send us your coupon today so you don't miss a single issue of our new series.



Send to:
THE ROCKFORD PAPERS
934 North Main
Rockford, IL 61103

☐ Enclosed is $11.00. Start my one-year subscription to *THE ROCKFORD PAPERS* with your January issue on **The Rejectionist School** — and *rush* me your series back issues on **Kurt Vonnegut, William Styron, Marilyn French/Mary Gordon, E.L. Doctorow** and **Gore Vidal** which I missed.

☐ Enclosed is $6.00. Start my one-year (six bimonthly issues) subscription to *THE ROCKFORD PAPERS* with your January issue on **The Rejectionist School.**

☐ Bill me for $11.00.

NAME (please print)

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE ZIP

JCC

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ess of *The Precedence of Women,* itinerant lecturess, talkshow personality, and cryptolesbian." Jude and her hard-core friends lure Samantha away from Victor with a promise of an upwardly mobile position as assistant editor of a new women's magazine. Bill and Victor come home one evening to find notes from their wives announcing that they have gone to do what is really important to them. Victor plots revenge. The rest of the book consists of Nietzsche-like harangues in praise of vengeance and Victor's plans to inflict it on Jude and her associates. Some of this is funny, the way a stand-up comic in a cheap nightclub is funny. Stade's wit is incisive as he impales and shreds the intellectual pretentiousness of feminism, even invoking the Count of Monte Cristo, Hamlet, and other tragic male heroes. But it is also wearisome and wordy, as fiction narrated in the first person often is.

Of this ill-matched trilogy, Atwood's book is perhaps the most interesting, because it is at least about a woman, not a movement or a "lifestyle." Piercy is spewing stock hypocrisy, ponderous and humorless, ten years after that sort of thing began to fade in America. Unfortunately, Stade's *Confessions* isn't an adequate counterweight to Piercy. She makes speeches; he tells jokes. But the jokes only nip at the edges of the *style* of feminism, while ignoring or sidestepping its power as a pseudo-intellectual facade for bad writing, mean-spirited politics, and old-fashioned prurience. The work of fiction that will confront feminism for what it is, it seems, has not yet been written. □

Punks, Potheads, & Phonies

Marshall W. Fishwick: *Common Culture and the Great Tradition: The Case for Renewal;* Greenwood Press; Westport, CT.

Timothy Leary: *Changing My Mind, Among Others;* Prentice-Hall; Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

Malcolm E. Smith: *The Real Marijuana Danger;* Suffolk House; Smithtown, NY.

by Clay Clemens

Three books which have come along offer a reminder that debris from the 1960's still litters our landscape; damage was, after all, the decade's only enduring product. If you seek a monument to that prolonged spasm of protest and "reform" which John Roche calls our very own Phony Cultural Revolution, look about you. Public education sags under the dead weight of "democratization" and academic bureaucracy, with a search for some way back to the basics only now getting under way. Our mass media broadcast across only those frequencies set for familiar liberal buzzwords, forcing genuine debate on intellectual matters and public policy onto less-accessible channels of communication.

The 1960's left few American institutions untouched; for those it touched, it was usually the touch of death. The urge to abolish often preceded the capacity to transform, and the amount of creative change was remarkably limited. A tongue-in-cheek film made several years ago depicted hapless bureaucrats trying in vain to illustrate the benefits of urban renewal: they could produce pictures of old tenements being torn down, but none of new apartments going up. Like urban redevelopment—spawn of the 60's—the decade rarely delivered on its promise of renewal. What the demolition crews often failed to recognize was the value of foundations. Feminists, counterculture elites, campus radicals, and their allies in the Establishment zealously laid waste to traditional structures while believing they could be replaced by prefab ideals. Old communities were destroyed in the name of racial harmony, and established religion suffered at the hands of pious sociologists. Yet apologists for the 60's still cling to the conviction that somewhere in that ragout of hubris, ignorance, and violence was the taste of real progress. At a recent conference, several experts discussed the emergence of a 60's-style "alternative" establishment in West Germany—a country where some cultural clocks have been set back 15 years. Squatters and radicals are administrators in cities like Berlin, while other elements of the counterculture increasingly influence national politics. None of this dismayed one American participant at the conference, who judged that the so-called alternatives clearly provide a system of values which appeal to the disenchanted youth of West German society. The woman was, fittingly, a member of Senator Ted Kennedy's staff; her dreams will never die.

Apparently Marshall Fishwick is content with much that the 1960's wrought. The decade opened his eyes to all that is wrong with our concept of culture. He discovered in that tempestuous time that culture need not be inspired by lofty aspirations and ideals, nor must it derive from abstract notions like beauty and symmetry. The decade revealed to him that a "common culture" well below the exalted heights of elitist art, literature, and philosophy is available to us all, though we may not know it. Certain timeless elements in our everyday life form the basis of culture, things which appear spontaneously generation after generation, linking us with both our ancestors and our descendants. They are "fundamental": folklore, myths, and hero worship, for example. In short, this imagery is the stuff of which culture is truly composed, and Mr. Fishwick sees it as the thread of continuity in our history.

The passage of time alters only the

Mr. Clemens is a doctoral candidate at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

form and not the substance of Fishwick's culture: Harlequin becomes Emmet Kelly becomes Ronald McDonald. Similar impulses manifest themselves differently depending on the era. For example, "the idea of having sacred things is no less prevalent today than it was yesterday," but *Homo religiosus* has now transferred his fixation from things spiritual to things athletic; thus football is our faith, and the Super Bowl today's most holy rite. Though each generation contributes new threads to the fabric of the common culture, Fishwick fears that our current obsession with gadgetry threatens to drown common culture. Technology assaults our senses and may wipe out the age-old common imagery. Rescue, in Fishwick's analysis, comes from an unlikely quarter: our mass media are unconsciously reviving and spreading old elements of the common culture so widely that their survival is assured. Common complaints, common knowledge, common usage, now common culture—all transmitted by our various media. Today's electronic and print media are, moreover, so ubiquitous that they can help squeeze out the false culture of elitist values. This may sound like a vastly simplified version of Marshall McLuhan, but it is not. McLuhan's Global Village is not Fishwick's shining City on the Hill. For Fishwick, the media's role is not one of creating new cultural forms but of spreading in different guises the older forms.

Little of what Fishwick says about "common culture" of the past is especially illuminating: nothing he says about "common culture" today is particularly novel. Pop anthropologists and amateur sociologists have exhausted the McDonald's theme, but Fishwick devotes a whole chapter to our obsession with the golden arches. His observations about the importance of print media, population growth, the earth's finite resources, celebrities, etc., etc., are commonplaces. They are familiar points and generally credible—but Fishwick's attempt to synthesize all this into some comprehensive theory is not satisfactory. He fails to persuade the reader that his definition of culture is well thought-out or compelling.

Fishwick's failure can be traced to flaws in his design. As he warns at the outset, the 60's so thoroughly trashed old forms that he felt obliged to re-examine our cultural roots. The experience led to the insight that elitist art, philosophy, and literature are often on an intellectual plane not merely higher than but also separated from common experience; thus they seemed to him superficial, not fundamental, contrived, not spontaneous. There may be some truth in that broad indictment, but Fishwick goes on to posit that any *real* culture must be inspired largely by the everyday, the material, the concrete, the instinctive. There is no sense that these are the very things we often attempt to transcend in culture, or that culture, rather than reflecting only what we are and what we have, should reflect what we strive to attain.

Fishwick rarely uses the word "values" because he is far more concerned with the norm than with norms. Yet therein lies the problem with his concept of culture: in celebrating the common denominator, he ignores the higher values. His type of culture is derived, not inspired. In dismissing as "elite" so much of what we traditionally consider culture, he ignores the fact that it could never have survived unless it expressed something more fundamental than class prejudice.

It is no coincidence that the 1960's also produced Timothy Leary, or, more precisely, thrust the demented doctor onto center stage. His dementia is in full flower in *Changing My Mind,* a collection that outlines the LSD philosophy. According to Leary, psychedelic drugs expand consciousness in such a way that the user permanently develops a whole new image of the world. Leary contends that an LSD experience demonstrates the enormous capacity of the human mind; when fully used, the mind can be—and is—everything: the creator of energy and action, thoughts and deeds. Leary's favorite revelation is that the mind even created God, but in that it has fooled us: because our minds are omnipotent, they are—*we* are—the gods. Such insights persuade the perceptive user of LSD to break all social constraints, all antiquated notions that we are accountable to anyone but ourselves. Leary's is a cry for brain liberation, which leads to the fulfillment of self-potential—LSD is the modern way to catharsis. This kind of lunatic ranting would be merely laughable if so many had not taken Leary so seriously and with such disastrous results. There is bitter though unintended irony in Leary's observation that "now, twenty years later, we are harvesting the fruits of this disorganized, mass brain-scrambling."

There are various possible explanations as to why Leary's salesmanship proved so effective. Certainly the sheer novelty of psychedelic drugs appealed to many, as did the chance to escape everyday life: why not dabble with some mind-bending chemicals when booze, pot, and everything else have lost their allure? Like Christopher Columbus (to whom this book is dedicated) Leary announced the discovery of an entirely new

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

world, and many who were bored with the old eagerly set sail. But psychedelic adventures themselves were not Leary's main selling point for LSD. He purported, somewhat arrogantly, to offer more than a mere stimulant, and derided those many poor fools who failed to appreciate his favorite drug's social and scientific significance. Inexplicably, many academicians and psychologists legitimized LSD's widespread use. Conferences and journals devoted enormous time and space to the topic of psychedelic experimentation. Leary "turned on" half of Harvard. He is particularly delighted to point out that "theologians" and "clergymen" joined the psychedelic consensus. Several hundred of the latter participated in the worthy spiritual endeavor which proved that "your brain is God." In short, the willingness, the anxiety, the fervor to overthrow tradition led ostensibly responsible professionals to advocate the ingestion of psychedelic drugs. Perhaps entranced by a world view that put their own minds at the center of their respective universes, they hardly noticed the horrifying hubris of Leary's vision. It was all so marvelously objective and material, and held out the promise of a world without myth, mysticism, or constraints. Two decades later, Marshall Fishwick can say about Leary's cult:

> A 'theology of counter culture' emerged. Intelligent and articulate people conceived and spread it. The spectacle of drug addicts and casualties should not obscure the magic of those heady days.

Such comments say more about Fishwick and his contemporaries than they do about Leary himself.

The dirty little secret of the 60's is that it—not the following decade—witnessed the zenith of the Me Generation. The stirring fanfare of idealism nearly drowned out a steady beat of self-gratification; the love so violently and self-righteously preached was always left in abstract terms. Leary and company are extreme cases, but their indulgence in LSD was nothing more than the ultimate ego trip, and today the doctor shows no remorse. That is, perhaps, most disturbing of all. Not without reason was Leary called the most dangerous man in America; he legitimized and glorified the use of psychedelic drugs, and for all the suffering that created, Leary has not one word.

Accompanying the rise of LSD use in the 60's was a broad enthusiasm for marijuana. Leary's attempts to breathe life into his own cult notwithstanding, psychedelic drugs are dead, but pot is still popular. It is unpretentious, the stuff of good times, getting high, getting stoned, a symbol of the 60's, the preferred indulgence of those who refuse to leave that decade behind them, and of the youngsters who emulate them.

For many years, experts have suspected marijuana to be dangerous to one's health, but they often overstated their case. Many warnings were so exaggerated that they served to *increase* interest in marijuana: a very early anti-pot movie—*Reefer Madness*—is so ludicrous that it has become a staple on the campus film circuit. Over the past few years responsible critics, determined foes of pot's legalization, have marshaled their facts more effectively. A popular book by Malcolm Smith, *With Love From Dad*, has now been updated and released under the title *The Real Marijuana Danger*. Yet even Smith's book doesn't make an adequate case. It reads exactly like what it in all probability was—a concerned parent's collection of clippings about marijuana's hazards. Capsule descriptions of pot-smoking's ill effects fill the book—there are 758 entries culled from sources ranging from Senator James Eastland to *National Review* to the Moroccan Undersecretary of Health. Each brief paragraph notes a particular hazard without specifying the periods of use or dosage levels which must obtain before any risk is incurred, a shortcoming that allows skeptics to treat the book the way some people treat warnings about cigarettes: only the "heavy smoker" is in trouble. Smith, moreover, takes the shotgun approach to citing dangers—marijuana is said to cause both impotence *and* insatiability. Obviously, this tactic doesn't work. Much of the evidence Smith uses has been around, but it seldom impressed pot-smokers before. Such people are rarely interested in rational decision-making. The counterculture revolutionaries of the 60's and their heirs think, albeit with clouded minds, that they have won the right to enjoy themselves utterly free from the constraints of personal responsibility and antiquated values. They are our country's Lost Generation, not because no signs exist to guide them, but because they choose to disregard the signs that point in the right direction. □

Justice in America

We recently read about one Ms. Barrett who went on a Wild West rampage in Artesia, New Mexico, shooting and wounding her husband, comandeering a car at gunpoint, holding up a store, breaking into a home, and threatening first children and then police with her weapon. The D.A., one Mr. Klipstine, had no trouble at all convicting her of kidnapping, armed robbery, and aggravated battery. He resigned after the case nevertheless because of the punishment meted out by Judge Harvey Fott: a suspended sentence on condition that Ms. Barrett attend college and maintain a "C" average. Lest this ruling be somehow misunderstood as laxity toward crime, this master of jurisprudence emphasized that these particular crimes were prompted by unusual "emotional stress" and that he is actually "a hard-nosed conservative." We, however, do not think that it's the firmness of his nose that is determining his brand of conservatism, but rather the mushy softness of his brain. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

COMMENDABLES

On Politics and Poetry

Russell Kirk: ***Reclaiming a Patrimony;*** The Heritage Foundation; Washington, D.C.

Since publishing his landmark work *The Conservative Mind* in 1953, Dr. Russell Kirk has done so much through his writing, editing, and lecturing to define and enrich the conservative intellectual movement that any work appearing under his authorship commands notice. In the case of *Reclaiming a Patrimony* such attention is well rewarded. This is not, of course, to say that this slender volume should be ranked with Dr. Kirk's *Eliot and His Age* or his *The Roots of American Order.* As a collection of ten relatively short lectures (none longer than 13 pages) delivered on a variety of different occasions, it shares the limitations of other such compilations: unity is achieved primarily through the persistence of the author's rhetorical and philosophical ethos, not through any systematically developed thematic structure ("desultory fishing in many waters," Dr. Kirk calls it); thorough rigorousness of detail gives way to the suggestive brevity of generalization; anecdote and digression occasionally tempt the lecturer away from his main point. Nonetheless, *Reclaiming* does evince many of those qualities of mind and spirit which have made Dr. Kirk an informing force in the current attempt to renew "the patrimony of order and culture that Americans have inherited."

In his analyses of the tensions between Church and State, of the deplorable current state of humane letters, of the real mercy in capital punishment, of the arbitrary tendencies of teachers' unions, of Reagan's capacity for refreshing audacity, and of five other topics, Dr. Kirk covers small canvases with bold and sure strokes. His wisdom is of the sententious sort possessed by the thinker who is at home with large conceptions, and his graceful style is that of the scholar who wears his learning without affectation. "To perceive truth," Dr. Kirk begins his lecture on capital punishment, "we require images"; or, as he puts it in his comments on Reagan: "All truth lies in poetry." His vaticinations on Reagan's commitment to conviction rather than expedience already seem less than fully accurate, but his discussion of imaginative audacity as a critical need for any conservative leader makes the Reagan of his lecture a worthwhile symbol in his own right. Not many people read Burke to learn about the *events* of the French Revolution nowadays, but thousands are still refreshed by the moral and creative strength of his *Reflections* occasioned by that conflagration. Two centuries after Ronald Reagan and the mid-20th-century conservative resurgence that made him President, it seems at least possible that Dr. Kirk's writings may enjoy a similar readership. (BC) □

Joblessness in America

Village Voice sent out a reporter recently to get some first-hand information on employment opportunities in and around NYC. Posing as a semiskilled blue-collar worker, the reporter was unable to find anything—that is, anything that met his standards. He set $6.50 per hour as *his* minimum wage. In his week-long job hunt, he conversed often with *real* job-seekers. Almost uniformly these unemployed had refused work that was offered: it was too hard, too dirty, or, most important, it paid too little. Said one: "I could start tomorrow, but I'm not going to. They're paying $190 a week." Let's see, that's $760 a month; a McDonald's hamburger costs 49 cents, chicken is about 59 cents a pound . . . (RW) □

High Celebrations

William F. Buckley, Jr.: ***Atlantic High: A Celebration;*** Doubleday; New York.

Mr. Buckley manages a transatlantic voyage much the way he does his other endeavors: with flair, élan, and a generous portion of wit. One can hardly help but envy the man his energy and the organizational abilities that enable him to indulge in such an eclectic variety of activities. So we have *Atlantic High,* Mr. Buckley's "excuse" for a vacation of sorts on the high seas—from St. Thomas in the Caribbean to Marbella, just inside the Strait of Gibraltar. It's partly a sort of chronological journal, partly reminiscences of other sailing adventures (or misadventures), partly a collection of anecdotal observations: in short, an attractive hodgepodge, but one that includes overlong commentaries on the technology and gadgetry of sailing that is of interest, one must assume, to those who share Mr. Buckley's fascination with the sport and its accoutrements. He manages to squeeze in a few jabs at John Kenneth Galbraith, and his account of coping with his mammoth correspondence is endearing.

One can enjoy this glimpse into sailing, and into the life that the Buckleys of the world inhabit: it's the world of the well-scrubbed rich, who are conservatively comfortable with their demeanor, paraphernalia and intellectual equipment. It is exactly this wonderful equilibrium of spirit and correctness which makes Mr. Buckley so acceptably valuable to us, and makes us so pleased with his celebrations. (RW) □

IN FOCUS

Circus Wagons of Phosphorescence

Tom McNab: ***Flanagan's Run;*** William Morrow; New York.

Those who saw *Chariots of Fire,* winner of the Academy Award for the best picture of 1981, will likely be attracted to *Flanagan's Run* by a dust jacket that identifies its author, Tom McNab, as a script consultant and technical advisor for that film. As in the movie, readers will find a story about running featuring a Scottish commoner

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and a wealthy Englishman—though here the cast is much larger and the contest is a footrace across America. But the rare poignancy of *Chariots* derives from aspects of human experience deeper than athletic discipline: those who bought tickets for *Chariots* paid to see art; those, on the other hand, who buy McNab's novel will find only what the title promises—a run for their money. McNab tries very hard to elevate long-distance running in and of itself into a quasi-religion, but this irrational apotheosis of runners and running does not work well, lapsing at times into mawkish sentimentality about "the privileged few who can go close to reaching [their] own potential." In one of the most brilliantly conceived sequences in *Chariots,* Liddell preaches a sermon while the camera illustrates the meaning of his words with simultaneous scenes of the Olympic games from which Liddell has absented himself. His text, and an appropriate gloss upon the whole of *Flanagan's Run,* is found in Isaiah, chapter 40: "It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers . . ." □

Psychotherapeutic Bactine

David Reuben, M.D.: ***Dr. David Reuben's Mental First-Aid Manual: Instant Relief from 25 of Life's Worst Problems;*** Macmillan; New York.

Dan Ackroyd, from the original *Saturday Night Live,* would have known what to do with Dr. Reuben's introductory chapter. Reuben's prose creates an urge in the reader to run to someone, anyone, and read whole passages aloud in the fast-talking style used to sell things like Ackroyd's "miracle products." Both Dr. Reuben's language and his logic seem to be aimed at somewhere around the sixth-grade intellectual level.

But, in all fairness, the book does contain meager flashes of common sense. Having rejected from the start what he considers pseudopalliatives such as psychiatry, drugs, religion, traditional self-help books, cults, and exotic solutions, Dr. Reuben proceeds to offer his own proposals for relieving the emotional distress of problems like anxiety, boredom, depression, etc. Stop worrying; take up a new interest or hobby; get (and keep) busy; these, in brief, are his respective solutions. Obviously they are the same solutions that people have known about for millennia. Despite his earlier renunciation of religion as being "out-of-touch with the realities of everyday life," he has culled a great deal of material from Judeo-Christianity's main source book. A large portion of his advice on the resolution of personal problems, whether he's aware of it or not, rests on the "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" principle, and even more so on the old prayer:

> God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

For all his superficiality and simplism, Dr. Reuben does one thing worthy of note: in this age of blaming everyone and everything else for one's problems, he is an advocate of taking responsibility for one's own life. Even with a problem that often *isn't* the fault of the victim, e.g., unemployment, he counsels steps for action to deal with the situation rather than trying to locate a more abstract culprit. In his final chapter Dr. Reuben comes down four-square in support of, of all things, a *traditional* lifestyle. He rejects the notion of freedom from all standards of normalcy, and he even lists what amounts to a secularized version of Judeo-Christian traditional morality. He concludes:

> *If you want to feel good, you have to act good.* . . . You know what the choices are and you know what the consequences are. The rest is up to you! □

Gastronomic Delights and Soggy Leftovers

Jean-François Revel: ***Culture and Cuisine: A Journey Through the History of Food;*** Doubleday; New York.

Calvin Trillin: ***Uncivil Liberties;*** Ticknor & Fields; New Haven, CT.

An interesting controversy is currently raging in anthropological circles, not the one about creationism versus evolution, but about something very close to each *Homo sapiens:* food. The scientists are concerned with *Ramapithecus,* an apelike creature who was either still up in the trees or just moving down from them, who emerged on the scene some 15 to 17 million years ago. Obviously, no table scraps from the age remain (nor any tables); eating habits are being determined through the examination of teeth. One camp says, based on dental-wear patterns, that *Ramapithecus* ate primarily fruits, while another, which notes the very thick tooth enamel, claims the fellows ate, almost exclusively, nuts. Another related point in the prehistoric mode: ours is the only species that cooks its food; when the practice first started (did ancient man drop foodstuffs into a hot spring and thus have the debut of the boiled dinner, or did he sup on meat braised in a forest fire?) remains to be determined.

Jean-François Revel doesn't go quite as far back as these anthropologists in *Culture and Cuisine: A Journey Through the History of Food,* but he does venture back to the Greeks, citing the tastes exhibited by Aristophanes and the references to edibles in Plato. Boiling versus grilling, however, is a topic. Revel's concern isn't exclusively with the precise ingredients of dishes, which is one way he differs from other writers about food, though recipes from as far back as the third century A.D.—from the *Deipnosophistai* ("The Dinner of the Savants") by Athenaeus for preparing tuna—are included. *Taste,* both the quality of the food and the expectations of the historical palate, is a key concern, and so Revel recreates the flavor of the past through the use of texts—cookbooks and more imaginative literature—and illustrations in his sumptuous banquet. With the addition of this book to his oeuvre, the author of *Without Marx or Jesus* and *The Totalitarian Temptation* shows that he is truly a Frenchman: tendentious and a gourmand. His most recent text is a refreshing change from the ubiquitous books that admonish readers to starve or stuff themselves with noncaloric repasts fit only for those with anesthetized taste buds.

There is a notable difference between cuisine—even peasant or bourgeois—and *food.* Food is the sort of thing that an unmarried hungry person rummages about in his or her cupboards and fridge for—various canned things and frozen slabs—after a long day at work. One type of food that soars or sinks—there is no middle ground—is leftovers. This culinary rumination is con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tinued because of Calvin Trillin, author of *American Fried* and *Alice, Let's Eat,* two clever books about modern nutriments. Trillin is also a columnist for *The Nation;* his column is entitled "Uncivil Liberties," as is the collection of select pieces from that slot. Typically, Trillin deals with political subjects in his periodical journalism: he is supposed to be funny. However, as much wit is manifest in most of his columns as is evidenced by the selection of the title for the book. As food for thought—which presumably the essays for that erudite journal are supposed to be—Trillin's fare is fit only for a Fifth Avenue *Ramapithecus.* □

Perceptibles

Michael Ullman: ***Jazz Lives;*** Perigee Books/Putnam; New York.

Mr. Ullman's title is hardly a revelation, but he has composed a collection of profiles of and interviews with an impressive group of performers or kibitzers who are either still on the jazz scene, or have recently left it due to the inevitability of fate. He knows his subject and loves it, which—of course—gives him the ability to generate interest among all those who share with him the proud label of jazz aficionado.

* * *

Arthur Plotnik: ***The Elements of Editing: A Modern Guide for Editors and Journalists;*** Macmillan; New York.

This slender volume is bound to elicit chuckles and nods of agreement from seasoned editors as they recognize Mr. Plotnik's delineations of the personality types (compulsive, neurotic, fanatic) and situations (frantic, frenetic) with which they, themselves, have coped over the years. For beginning editors—indeed, for anyone in the myriad phases of journalism—*Elements* provides a general manual or guide—a sort of "Intro to Editing 101." Mr. Plotnik covers every major phase of editing both books and periodicals as well as such adjunct functions as photography and the selection of artwork. Among his worthwhile tips is a listing of reference books of value to any seasoned or aspiring editor—certainly Mr. Plotnik's volume should be on that shelf, too. (RW)

* * *

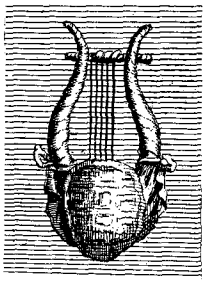
Best Editorial Cartoons of the Year: 1982 Edition; **Edited by Charles Brooks;** Pelican Publishing Co.; Gretna, Louisiana.

An ad that often serves as a filler in the pages of daily newspapers states: "Read an editorial today." While that declaration is simply motivated by page layout requirements, it is one that can loose a sting of remorse. After all, responsible, intelligent readers turn immediately from the front page to the editorial page, with no detour at the comics. Still, many of those conscientious readers are quite like the responding student in the old joke: "What do you like most about school?" "Lunch." Thus the cartoon on the editorial page, "political" in most cases, but not always (e.g., *The Wall Street Journal).* This collection contains more than 360 editorial cartoons that range in subject matter from Reaganomics to Charles and Diana, from MX missiles to medflies. The word *best* in any title, whether it be on a book or restaurant sign, is a key that things aren't always up to snuff. This case is no different. The lack of selections from Pat Oliphant and Jeff MacNelly—or even Jules Feiffer (to be fair)—is a fly in an otherwise tasty soup.

* * *

Harold Lindsell: ***Free Enterprise: A Judeo-Christian Defense;*** Tyndale House; Wheaton, IL.

As Dr. Lindsell explains in his preface, *Free Enterprise* is an attempt "to simplify the intricacies of economics, Marxism, the idea of freedom, and the reasons why Western civilization has come to its present state" so that they may be accessible to "as many lay people as possible." Accordingly, in his discussions of the firmly scriptural Judeo-Christian tradition of private ownership, of the hypocritical duplicity of "socialist Christians" and "liberation theologians," of the inevitable abridgment of liberty under socialism, and of the persistent failure of socialism to fulfill its promises or even to abide for



long by its own principles, Lindsell primarily summarizes arguments made more trenchantly and with more scholarly rigor elsewhere. Nevertheless, since academics and economists are not the only Americans who would feel "the yoke of socialism" if leftists were to prevail, the effort to popularize the moral, religious, and intellectual rationale for free enterprise is laudable. (BC)

* * *

Phyllis Méras: ***Carry-Out Cuisine;*** Houghton Mifflin; Boston.

From A (Abbondanza) to Z (Zabar's), the gourmet-food industry is thriving. In what the media tell us are severe economic straits—and those in the unemployment lines will confirm that—still there are many who both can and will pay premium prices for well-prepared, often exotic, fare for their tables. In her very brief introductions to each recipe obtained from these specialty shops, Ms. Méras relates a

snippet of information about the establishment from which it came. Often included are the backgrounds of the proprietors and a little name-dropping of patrons (Ethel Kennedy, Lena Horne, Henry Kissinger). Taken together, it tells a tale of life (for some, anyway) in America of the 1980's. For instance, it bespeaks a society in which the food and transportation industries have combined to make available year-round virtually any foodstuff imaginable. (Who can afford to pay for the fruits of this technology, of course, is another matter entirely.) The selection of dishes in *Carry-Out Cuisine* also seems to indicate that, at least among the elite, the meat-and-potatoes meal is a thing of the past—no meatloaf recipes or tips for perfect mashed potatoes here. Instead, there is an abundance of instruction for preparing patés, salads, quiches. No surprise—after all, Ralph Lauren and Perry Ellis don't design their fashions in "added-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dimensions" sizes.

But many of the recipes that Ms. Méras has collected do sound reasonable and appetizing—the desserts are especially mouth-watering. So now, for only the price of the book, ordinary folk across the country can wow their friends at the next church potluck with dishes from the most exclusive metropolitan emporia. (RW) □

WASTE OF MONEY

Doleful Dirge for an Aging Delinquent

Enzo Siciliano: ***Pasolini;*** Random House; New York.

by Stephen Macaulay

Consider the following treatment, as if for a screenplay. A young man with agonizingly acute artistic sensibilities living in Italy visits a small village, Ramuscello, on September 30, 1949, the feast day of Saint Sabina. The villagers, with their lust for life, mark the day with merrymaking. The brooding 27-year-old watches the frolics and imbibes the good, cheap vino. Explains his biographer: "What caught Pier Paolo in those moments was the promiscuity of the dance floor, the sexual excitement induced by wine, and the expectation that was created, in the bodies and overheated tension, between one dance and another—the special intoxication of the peasant festival." The hero, Latin blood at a rolling boil, meets three lads, one 16 years old, the others younger. Off the quartet go, into the darkness, to vent their passions. The scene changes to a local carabinieri headquarters. The artist is asked about what occurred on the night of September 30. He responds, his biographer says, "I was trying an erotic and literary experiment, under the influence of a book I had been reading—a novel on the subject of homosexuality." André Gide, the Nobel Prize winner of two years earlier, is his rationale. A quick cut to a meeting of the executive committee of the Communist Federation of Pordenone. It decides, his talents as propagandist notwithstanding, that the young writer is an undesirable for the Italian Communist Party; it expels him. It was "a traumatic blow." The branded writer is shown penning a letter; a voice-over includes the lines: "Despite you all, I am and will remain a Communist, in the most genuine sense of the word. . . . Someone else in my place would kill himself; unfortunately I have to live for my mother." This vignette is just an early figure in what Enzo Siciliano calls "The obsessive pattern of the attacks to which Pasolini was to be subject for the rest of his life as a public figure." The audience is meant to wail uncontrollably over the brutish ill-treatment of the pensive, true-Red, mother-loving figure.

Pier Paolo Pasolini, perhaps best known as a filmmaker of the postwar Italian neorealist school, never made a movie that called for Kleenex. One of those bags found in the seat pockets on airplanes is more appropriate. Pasolini's opus was what he called *Trilogy of Life,* which comprised his filmed versions of *The Decameron, Canterbury Tales,* and *Arabian Nights* (1971, 1972, and 1974, respectively). About the three and their creator, *Chronicles* film critic Eric Shapearo wrote: "Each is an attempt to say something by someone who has nothing but banality to say." Pasolini was partial to filming performances in which the participants —it's hard to use the words *actors* and *actresses*—cavort about in little more than necklaces or hair ornaments. Pasolini also wrote poety, such as *Le ceneri di Gramsci* ("The Ashes of Gramsci"), which indicates that he didn't hold a grudge against the Italian CP and which substantiates Shapearo's observation about Pasolini's vapidity (e.g., "But since I possess history,/it possesses me; I am illuminated by it:/but what good is the light?").

Flash forward: November 2, 1975, early morning at a seaplane basin near Rome. Carabinieri find a body. The face is disfigured, the skull is riddled with deep wounds, the ear is nearly ripped off. The corpse: Pasolini. Shift to a courtroom. Legally, Pasolini was killed by a 17-year-old known on the streets as Pino the Frog. Pasolini picked him up in his Alfa GT on one of the innumerable nights that the director had gone "cruising" for boys. Giuseppe Pelosi, the Frog, testified that he struck out at Pasolini because Pier Paolo made a sexual advance with a fence stake. Brutal, perhaps, but as Siciliano intones, "To live his life outrageously, to the ultimate risk—this was Pasolini's courage." Siciliano, however, doesn't buy Pelosi's story. In his tender biography of Pier Paolo (he almost always uses the given names) Siciliano cries, "To strike at Italian culture through Pasolini could be to light a fuse, with unforeseeable consequences." Conspiracy is in the air: "power structure," "underworld mission of retaliation," etc. But Pasolini's ultimate fate seems, rather, a predictable end, one foreshadowed 26 years earlier. Roll the credits. Ventilate the auditorium. □

Waste of Paper

Richard Kluger: ***Un-American Activities;*** Doubleday; New York.

Richard Kluger's *Un-American Activities* is the story of a freshman at Harvard in the 1930's who is unhappy with the state of things in America. He grapples with the fundamental principles that make America what it is. He nurtures his ideas at meetings of the Harvard Liberal Club, a few demonstrations, the CCC camps where he heads the education program, a newspaper in New York, and so on. He also perfects his intellect with the help of Cheska, Temple, April, Bonnie, Sylvia, Nina—the list goes on and on. After the first hundred pages, it begins to be clear that to Mr. Kluger a young man's turmoil means a struggle with an insatiable libido rather than with political ideologies.

Tennyson once said "there is more faith in honest doubt than in half your creeds." A young man who agonizes over the very fundamentals of his existence may be interesting, on occasions even moving. However, the character Mr. Kluger creates does not agonize over anything —except, perhaps, a date who won't put out. He is incapable of committing himself to a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cause. He finally chooses capitalism through marriage. Whether there's a moral or existential lesson in it is hard to say: Mr. Kluger has used 700 pages to make it perfectly obscure. (JM)

On the Warpath Against the Right

Rex Weyler: ***Blood of the Land: The Government and Corporate War Against the American Indian Movement;*** Everest House; New York.

In the typical Westerns of the 40's and 50's Indians appeared only as depraved and vicious savages fit only to be shot by the noble-hearted cowboys and settlers whose lives they threatened. Not only did these stereotypes slander an entire race and its culture, but they also obscured the guilt of the white man, who often robbed and slaughtered the Indian as he conquered the continent, at times ignoring treaties even before the ink was dry. And though the worst offenses ended about the turn of the century—when the Indians apparently had little left to give—prejudice and injustice still occur, especially when reservation lands hold energy, water, or mineral resources that white men now want. *Blood of the Land* by Rex Weyler is an attempt both to explode the degrading myths about Indians and to expose the past and present rapacity of whites. Weyler's effort, however, is simply not credible, for in place of the red devil/Gary Cooper stereotypes, Weyler substitutes noble savage/fiendish white capitalist caricatures which likewise belie reality.

Actually, more than a red skin is required for apotheosis in Weyler's book: Indians who are not in full support of the goals and methods of AIM (the American Indian Movement), which seized Alcatraz in 1969 and Wounded Knee in 1973 in order to publicize their view of Indian rights, and WARN (Women of All Red Nations), the feminist subsidiary, are somehow not fully "Indian" and indeed come in for the kind of censure Weyler applies to most whites. (The term Weyler uses to designate those whose Indianhood stands approved is "traditional," but is difficult to see how "energetic young Indians" attired in T-shirts, cowboy hats, and modish sunglasses are more "traditional" than the older and less militant tribal councils they scorn.) In the melodrama Weyler constructs, the simonpure "traditionals" battle heroically against the sinister and unending machinations of the white man and his corrupt institutions, especially his "multinational corporations" (Weyler's favorite Satan term). Weyler does present facts suggesting that lust for corporate profits does sometimes cause red suffering. But in his facile and sweeping condemnation of Big Business, the American and Canadian governments, and the Mormon Church as conspiring profitmongers, he far outruns his evidence. Indeed, Weyler slavishly follows AIM's own interpretations of all events without seriously investigating their validity from any other perspective. The reason is that ideology, not scholarly honesty, guides his research; he rewrites the most inhuman of Old West cliches: "The only good capitalist is a dead capitalist." Predictably, those whites properly aligned against capitalism and in favor of AIM—the 60's hippies, the World Council of Churches, the no-nukes crowd, the unilateral disarmament movement, the environmentalist crusade—somehow escape Weyler's malediction. Weyler even interprets a Hopi legend in such a way as to give a supernatural sanction to this leftist agenda. Not surprisingly, one other white group—the communists—come off fairly well. Allende and the Sandinistas are championed as the governors most in harmony with Indian wisdom, though Weyler claims that "traditional" Indians oppose Soviet aggression and that their nature-philosophy transcends all "Neo-European" systems of order. How simple Indian "naturalness" could ever resist Soviet might or continue to sport about in the capitalist-manufactured Landcruisers appearing in the pictures of AIM leaders, Weyler does not explain. (BC) □

Dick Clark Meets Marx

Simon Frith: ***Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll;*** Pantheon Books; New York.

One of the better films of recent years about the rock-music business *(n.b.)* is *One-Trick Pony* (1980), which was made by songwriter-singer Paul Simon. The plot indicates the artistic growth and economic decline of a songwriter-singer (played by Simon) who had "made it" in the 60's with an antiwar ballad and who finds himself in the 80's playing his jazz-oriented music as the opening act for a punk-rock band, played in the film by the B-52's (from doves to strategic bombers, who would have thought it possible!). The point of the film is captured in a simple lyric: "Lord, I am a working man/And music is my trade." Few markets are so volatile as that of rock, and there is as much demand for the trade Simon's character wants to ply as there is for blacksmiths in Detroit; he is decidedly not punk, and he doesn't want to become a living fossil, a fixture in a "Golden Oldies Show." Rock now encompasses more than records, tapes, and concert tours; posters, T-shirts, postcards, hats, stickers, mirrors, decals, etc. are part of the business; record companies are well aware of the fact that an act that makes it in the 80's stands to make a bundle for all concerned. *Rolling Stone* leads its readers to believe that rock is glamorous, the turf of strong individuals who make the music that they want to play, destroy hotel rooms when the fancy strikes them, party (an omnibus term) continuously, and generally have a good time. If Simon's picture is more accurate—and it probably is—then the rock industry is an extremely grimy one, wherein many key participants have more in common with juvenile and aging prostitutes than with the objects of magazine-cover photos: if the clients want redheads, then up-and-coming carrot-tops will have an easy time of it; those long in the tooth will immediately turn to Clairol.

Rock, as Simon Frith points out in his ill-subtitled examination, is more than a musical subgenre; it is an entire lifestyle for both active and passive participants. Rock has long been treated as a social and musical aberration. Given the fact it will soon be 20 years since The Beatles took the airwaves and cash registers of America by storm, it's clear that such treatment is more than slightly anachronistic. It's commendable that Frith makes a sociological examination of the subject. He does many laudable things in his turgid work, such as showing that those men and women who top the charts are often more like the greedy industrialists of 19th-century novels than the devil-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

may-care spirits presented in journals like *Rolling Stone*, which Frith shows as being as counterculture as the *New York Times*. Certainly there's nothing revelationary about these facts per se, but it is a wonder to find them coming from such a source. However, such interesting observations are buried under Frith's impenetrable prose, which is, perhaps, his tribute to his heroes in the Frankfurt School of Marxism. "Rock music is capitalist music," he concludes, adding: "It draws its meanings from the relationships of capitalist production, and it contributes, as a leisure activity, to the reproduction of those relationships; the music doesn't challenge the system but reflects and illuminates it." Frith's problem is that he *likes* the capitalist beat, which causes him to flail about, spouting Marcuse and Benjamin, as he tries to show that rock is both destructive and constructive of artistic and social values, a feat of dialectics that, of course, he never pulls off. It's as if Frith is rating a totally unrhythmic record on *Bandstand* with the rationale that "It's easy to dance to," or a silent, Cage-like composition with the claim, "It's got a good beat." Although he ultimately sinks, his foundering is often worthy of note. □

LIBERAL CULTURE

Village Maven

In an article about General Westmoreland's lawsuit against CBS concerning the network's attack on his ability and integrity during the Vietnam War, a *Village Voice* sage, seething with marinated rage against anything the U.S. Army might have done, writes:

> The first time I saw a Vietnamese army captain beat a prisoner, I had a gut feeling that we had sided with the wrong Vietnamese.

Of course, we should have taken the side of those who exterminated nearly a million Catholics before the war had even started, who then assassinated a million or so peasants in the South who refused to side with them, and who, after conquering the South, reduced it to a tropical gulag. Obviously, we should have been allied with those who tortured war prisoners, who forced hundreds of thousands of boat people to opt for the possibility of cruel death, and—above all—who slaughtered millions of human beings in Cambodia in the name of a theory. We should have sided with the communists; you see, at least *they* do not beat prisoners.

Hamartia Revisited

Joseph Pulitzer (1847–1911), among other things, was once the police commissioner of St. Louis, a position in which he, presumably, fought crime and vice; Mr. Pulitzer was always a great one for attacking such things while turning them to his own benefit. His newspapers, for example, affected the stance of moral exemplars. His name even identifies an award which is supposed to fortify high ethics in journalism. Pulitzer, of course, is known as the father of "the new journalism," a textbook euphemism used in place of the more accurate "yellow journalism," which thrived on the most scurrilous things existent—or nonexistent. The ancient Greeks maintained that the sins of a father would be visited upon his sons. There may be something to this, as evidenced by the recent divorce trial involving Joseph Pulitzer's grandson Peter Pulitzer and his wife of six years, Roxanne. Notes a newspaper report:

> Mrs. Pulitzer is an adultress, a cocaine addict, a pathological liar, a believer in spirits and a lesbian, charges Robert Scott, lawyer for her husband.

On the other side it says:

> Mrs. Pulitzer's lawyers accuse the publishing scion of making drug hauls from Colombia, sleeping in the same bed as his daughter during a European tour and indulging in three-way sex with his wife and the 32-year-old spouse of an heir to the Kleenex tissue fortune.

If Joseph Pulitzer were alive today, he couldn't have bought a better story—depraved rich people, kinky sex, drugs, the occult.

Caveat Emptor

Advertising Age is a trade journal devoted to improving product promotion—foodstuffs, toilet paper, automobiles, etc. Advertisers in its pages are primarily magazines, newspapers, agencies, and the like, all of which explain how they reach vast, rich audiences. Apparently, some modern writers have their minds on the same objective and pursue it with the same sense of professional ethics as that of, say, cosmetics producers. In a recent *Advertising Age*—snuggled between an ad for an underwriters' magazine and another for a slide-rule company—we spotted a commercial announcement for "The thunderously acclaimed bestseller by John Irving, author of *Garp*." It leads us to wonder about Mr. Irving's self-promotional strategies: will there be ads in animal-husbandry magazines touting his use of bears in his books? Will we witness a line of Garp wrestling-wear? Will the Hotel New Hampshire become the name of a new hostelry chain? Or, most interesting of all, will Mr. Irving sell ad space in his next production and thus usher in the age of scratch-and-sniff novels?

The Age of Reason

Ms. Rosalie Strett, director of two storefront clinics in Baltimore at which young people can get free contraceptives, no questions asked, recently explained:

> We're preaching abstinence, talking about protection. We are not teaching promiscuity.

Really?

Self-enforcing Laws

In a recent issue of *Ms.* magazine we may read this observation:

> There is an iron law that whenever you invent an awkward social custom that twists human nature out of shape, you have to create a hundred more to compensate for the emotional mess it makes.

We agree. We warmly welcome self-reevaluation. We look forward to untwisting the feminist mess with the help of *Ms.*'s neosagacity. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SCREEN

A Lark from the Hollywood Hills

***My Favorite Year;* Written by Dennis Palumbo; Directed by Richard Benjamin; MGM.**

When television became a viable commercial medium, there was justifiable concern in Hollywood. The primary fear was that movie audiences would desert the palace aisles for the comfort of their living rooms. Compounding things for the then-shrinking moguls was the 1949 Supreme Court decision that companies which made films didn't have a monopoly on distribution; the studios were forced to give up their theaters. Prior to the advent of television, the only real competition to movies was put forth by radio (radios were a common fixture in homes) but to imagine is to work, and people, in their leisure hours, tend to prefer entertainment that is laid out complete for them. (This desire for ease also helps explain the relative nonsuccess of the foreign films that began to find their way into theaters thanks to the Court's decision.) Obviously, moviemakers in the 50's had a great deal of work to do, and they came up with things like 3-D and Cinerama to entice patrons. The television industry eventually countered with affordable color sets, which sent the film industry back to "Go," without its $200. As things have shaken out, the movie screen is the medium for the giant, expensive, *Star Wars*-type blockbuster; TV is the medium for everything else. When action-packed film adventures of the *Star Wars* variety aren't made, then a musical is filmed—such as *Grease,* which had as its stars a TV personality and a successful female singer—or a "sensitive" story is shot, but only with certified stars, as in *On Golden Pond,* or a comedy is cast with Burt Reynolds and his gang of pranksters. Comedy, I think, is suffering most on the silver screen. If the idea isn't a big one, then that idea seems to be reduced to the plot for a television "sitcom" (a jargonlike appellation that indicates that the form is a tactic).

An exception to this state of affairs is *My Favorite Year,* a light comedy. Interestingly, it takes as its setting television in 1954. Chances are, when the words *television* and *1954* are yoked, synapses spark and the mental IBM punched card is emitted reading: "Army-McCarthy hearings." *My Favorite Year* is not a variation on the 1976 film *The Front,* which many moviegoers *thought* was going to be funny, based on the fact that Woody Allen is the lead actor (the term *star* can't be used with regard to that pathetic film). Indeed, it is impossible to tell what is going on in Washington during the unfolding of *My Favorite Year;* like any good comedy, it avoids overwhelming topicality so that its humor can be discerned in another time, another place. The required coordinates are simply that in 1954 variety shows were broadcast live from television studios, that swashbuckler movies were big (e.g., Errol Flynn starred in both *The Master of Ballantrae* and *Crossed Swords* in 1953), and that TV was becoming increasingly important to survival on the silver screen. There is only one astounding thing about *My Favorite Year:* it is a genuine whimsy, a welcome change from the sex-filled Punch and Judy, Punch and Punch, Judy and Judy (and other permutations) spoofs creeping on the screens today. (SM) □

ART

An Incomplete Beauty

Robert Philippe: *Political Graphics: Art as Weapon;* Abbeville Press; New York.

Here is a superb collection of drawings, sketches, engravings, paintings, and various other forms of visual expression that serve ideologies, social concepts, propaganda slogans, electoral battles, and wars of ideas. Some of the images, pictures, publicity posters, prints, lithographs, and chromatic plates have been rescued—mercifully—from the oblivion of archives and museums; they provide fabulous insight into the never-changing techniques of political prevarication elevated to heights at which art becomes political argument, thus abandoning claims to feeling, sagacity, and credibility. Characteristically, during the early stages of Western civilization in Europe, the moral and dialectical depth of political caricature still held some title to the pursuit of truth and wisdom: graphic and intellectual ironies abounded, a larger sense of venality than class enmity or antiprogressivism comes to the fore. Further into the 19th and throughout our own century, the left-liberal bias of the album's editors is discernible in their choices of names and exemplifications. The author, Professor Philippe of the French École des Hautes Études and University of Le Mans, tries to preserve some note of objectivity, but the very selection of only American contemporary graphic artists indicates a sort of hatchet job. Anyone with leftish credentials is presented; Jules Feiffer the hysterical "progressive," Edward Sorel the *Village Voice* beacon, or Ralph Steadman the practitioner of mindless venom, are loudly celebrated. In contrast, Oliphant is reproduced, but without a by-line, and he is not mentioned in the index; people whose persuasions resemble those of MacNelly go unregistered—*read* obliterated. And one minor flaw that should be pointed out is that the index of names does not always furnish the correct references. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOURNALISM

Scurvy Self-Righteousness

In an editorial in *The Nation* we can read:

> Israel describes itself as a democracy and should be judged by the standards of a democracy.

Notice, please, the predicate "describes itself." In liberal newspeak, of which *The Nation* is one of the main codifiers, a democracy that elects a nationalist conservative government is not really a democracy. But what about standards? *The Nation* has little problem with that: the Soviet Union does not describe itself as a democracy, so it has a nonnegotiable right to murder 60 million of its citizens. *The Nation* will be understanding of that; there is scarcely any mention of this historical circumstance in its pages.

Further along, *The Nation* opines:

> Israel can only be stronger if it rids itself of that which is rotten within it.

The first question that comes to mind is: who is defining and qualifying Israel's "rot"? Why, of course, *The Nation*. Its columns ooze with judgments about American rot, so why not expand the moral wheeler-dealership? But imagine the howls of indignation from *The Nation* and its intellectual mob if Mr. Begin dared to say something about the rot of liberal media gangsterism in America, about the cynical trafficking in falsified images and facts by the liberal truth-muggers. To a foreign eye, such a circumstance is certainly rot, but how shrilly it is protected by all the might of American liberal bigotry.

And so we read with utter resignation the following advertisement in the back of *The Nation:*

> When drafting your will, please consider making a bequest to *The Nation.*

We had always deluded ourselves into thinking that the radicals of *The Nation's* stripe have nothing but contempt for inheritance, that they fiercely support state appropriation of all hereditary funds. How naive. When it comes to support, the publishers of *The Nation* seem to see anything concocted by Tartuffe as a radic-lib catechism. □

THE AMERICAN PROSCENIUM

Politics & Culture

Is there a lesson in the 1982 midterm election? Of course, just as there is in every exercise of people's wishes, needs, and preferences as they are expressed through the democratic process—its deficiencies and perversions notwithstanding. The grand lesson of this election is that we, The Rockford Institute, are touching in our work upon something crucial when we speak of and write about the influence of culture—or rather high culture—on the sociopolitical universe of our free and pluralistic republic.

What we never tire of repeating is that the real war for America's social and spiritual shape is being waged in the human consciousness. One can win that war *only* by formulating morally and intellectually refined concepts, by promoting ideas that are deeply grounded in a sense of humanness and that have been tested by history. These ideas determine our sociomoral values, and *only* if they are constantly reformulated and re-evaluated, with the help of honest knowledge and intellectual sophistication, can they be translated into quotidian politics—which vies for the favors of the best-defined actuality. In other words: scholarship, science, literary skills, precision of thinking, accurate dialectics and rhetorical persuasiveness—remote as they seem from the vulgarity and grubbiness of the pursuit of votes by way of unsavory PR gimmicks—are exactly the factors that decide the fate of political ascents and downfalls, which, ultimately, are victories or defeats of articulated ideas. That those ideas may be faulty, or short-lived, or projecting a false perspective of reality is another matter; if they are argued from a background of solid data and spring from even misperceived truths, they will be momentarily triumphant—which, naturally, does not assure their future. Better-conceived, better-polished ideas will be taken up by fast-talking politicians, and the former notions will go down the drain in future elections. Thus, everything boils down to opening and cultivating channels with the high culture—the *only* incubator, polisher, and purveyor of social ideas and sentiments that end up in the media as issues of unemployment, Social Security, and national defense.

The big losers of the 1982 elections were conservative groupings, some of which are called the New Right, the Moral Majority, or the social-issues champions. We at The Rockford Institute have long anticipated a kind of letdown after their triumphs in the 1980 Presidential election. We sympathize with those parts of our society which project an unease—not too meticulously integrated, to be sure—with the elements of our sociocultural reality which seem bent on destroying traditions, customs, and behavioral norms, thus causing grief and bitterness in defenseless human minds and souls. We do consider many

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the "ultraconservative"—as they are called by cynical liberal entrepreneurs and writers—concerns and feelings fully legitimate. However, we also deplore the New Right's trivial faith in simplistic political slogans as an autonomous force, as well as the Moral Majority's reliance on righteous but worn-out platitudes, neither of which are adequate weapons in a confrontation with the glittering multitude of liberal socioexistential demands and promises. Yes, the anti-abortion issue, the antibusing impulse, the school-prayer postulate all can be potent political ingredients, but only as components of a larger sociomoral imperative endowed with multidimensional intellectual insights into modern man's condition. Then, such directives can be expertly and knowingly molded into a sophisticated analysis of the liberal detriment to humanness and Americanism, and—consequently—can be transformed into a cultural image that will serve as a political message. And such a stylish distillation of idea into political action can be obtained only through high culture, top-notch intellectual effort, functional scholarship.

There was one bright spot in the bleak November electoral landscape—the New York state gubernatorial race. There, Mr. Lewis Lehrman, businessman and economist, challenged all the liberal powers that be on the grounds of ideological contention. It was a unique challenge; not only was it made in the most hostile political environment possible, not only did it take up a cause that had been declared by all liberal and economic pundits as bankrupt, but even the economic reality of the particular historical moment testified against it and negated its rationality. Yet Mr. Lehrman, entrenched in a sociopolitical argument well grounded in ideology, withstood all derision, invectives, and insinuations and persisted in his faith in the theory. According to all political experts, such an attitude when vying for votes is suicidal. What mattered, however, was that his claim, that supply-side capitalism is the best way to deal with our economic adversities, has impeccable intellectual credentials, and this, unexpectedly, has revealed itself to be a political factor of magnitude. Before he entered politics Mr. Lehrman founded a research institute and did his homework well: thus he fluently spoke the language of an ideologically motivated politician propelled by the intellectual elaboration of his ideas—a species that is doomed to extinction, if we are to believe experts on American politics. He came just two points short of a victory over a liberal master of slogans. In New York.

Self-Assessment

Like everybody else, Mr. James Earl Carter, the 39th President of the United States, has written his memoirs. After glancing at their literary style and attempting to probe some of the book's historical analyses and judgments of the political scene (and its performers), we are reassured in our belief that the mental mediocrity of Mr. Carter is of exceptional dimension. During his tenure we always wondered about the image that his PR men and the entire press assiduously fostered—that of Mr. Carter as an "intellectual," a Tolstoy reader, a connoisseur of both art and the passions of body and soul. We rather thought of his mind as a reservoir of monumental trivialities. In a prepublication interview given to *Time* magazine, Mr. Carter concluded:

> I am at peace with the knowledge I did the best I could.

He's right. *That* was the gist of the problem.

Space-Age Apostolate

Last year's meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops—held in November in Washington, D.C.—propelled the venerable shepherds into a sort of spiritual brawl. At its origin was the question: What to do about the threat of nuclear war?

It's not up to us to pass opinionated judgments on ecclesiastical pacifism, allegiance to the flag, or raised consciousness regarding affairs of this world—here and now, on this planet. All we can deduce from the impassioned pleas—from both sides of the division between the abolitionists and the supporters of the idea of deterrence—is that the inability to clearly distinguish between the purple and the red means deep trouble. It's also obvious to us that there's much more to this ideological conflict than meets the eyes of national newsmagazines and other such dispensers of capsulated knowledge. The amazing strength of Catholicism in Poland is in its relentless defense of the integrity of life—personal, spiritual, social—from the wholesale invasion of politics. American profreeze bishops seem bent on doing just the reverse—they exert themselves to invite politics into daily and intimate human existence. By doing that, they emphasize Catholic conscience over Catholic wisdom. Yet, as many have learned—from St. Augustine and St. Thomas to Pascal and Maritain—it's exactly the latter which determines the victorious Catholic resilience in times of confusion and peril. (LT) □

In the Mail

America's Burke: The Mind of Thomas Hutchinson **by William Pencak; University Press of America; Washington, DC.** Hutchinson was the last royal civilian governor of Massachusetts; his defense of traditional society is examined in the light of Burke's similar stance.

The Creator in the Courtroom: Scopes II **by Norman L. Geisler; Mott Media; Milford, MI.** *McLean v. Arkansas,* the creation-evolution trial conducted in 1981, is examined, particularly in relation to its handling by the media and to traditional Judeo-Christian values.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Rockford Institute
934 North Main Street
Rockford, Illinois 61103

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED